DUMITRU STANILOAE

THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD

ORTHODOX DOGMATIC THEOLOGY

ὅταν ἐγενήθησαν ἄστρα ᾔνεσάν με
φωνῇ μεγάλῃ πάντες ἄγγελοί μου

VOLUME 2

THE WORLD: CREATION AND DEIFICATION

THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD

THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD
by Dumitru Staniloae

Volume 1. Revelation and Knowledge of the Triune God

Volume 2. The World: Creation and Deification

Volume 3. The Person of Jesus Christ as God and Savior

Volume 4. The Church: Communion in the Holy Spirit

Volume 5. The Sanctifying Mysteries

Volume 6. The Fulfillment of Creation

Dumitru Staniloae

THE EXPERIENCE OF GOD

Orthodox Dogmatic Theology
Vol. 2. The World: Creation and Deification

Translated and Edited by

Ioan Ionita
and
Robert Barringer

Preface by

Ion Bria

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Preface

This second volume of *The Experience of God* (which corresponds with the second part of the first volume of Fr. Staniloae's *Dogmatic Theology*, published in Romanian in 1978, reprinted in 1997) is an extensive and careful exploration of a new theme: *The World – Creation and Deification*. It was not customary among Orthodox theologians to include such a theme in their handbooks or university courses. Focusing his reflection on the world (understood both as humanity and as cosmic creation) was not, however, accidental for Fr. Staniloae. It was a permanent concern of his and was developed by him in several stages. In fact, by formulating a theology of the world, Fr. Staniloae indicated a new approach for theological epistemology, which is strongly emphasized in this volume. At the same time, he offered here some farsighted research into one of the most critical subjects in ecumenical theology.

This dimension of Fr. Staniloae's theological work is also one that is better known in the West because of earlier publications (see "The World as Gift and Sacrament of God's love," *Sobornost*, 9:1969, pp. 662-673). Some years ago, when the *Ecumenical Review* presented the "Creative Vision" of Fr. Staniloae, I wrote a few pages about this theme of the *World* (Nr. 33,3:1981, pp. 53-59). In that same number of the *Review*, Daniel Neeser contributed "The World: Gift of God and Scene of Humanity's Response" (pp. 272-282), and earlier, for the purpose of providing a more adequate context for Fr. Staniloae's writings on the topic, I had written a short commentary in the *Revue de théologie et de philosophie* titled "Pour situer la thélogie du Père Staniloae" (Nr. 112: 1980, pp. 133-137, and see also "The experience of the World in Orthodox Theology. Fr. Staniloae's contribution," in *Biserica Ortodoxa Romana*, 9-10: 1980).

All this explains why, when the World Council of Churches organized (at the Monastery of Grandchamp, Neuchatel) a symposium in December, 1981, on the WCC Vancouver Assembly theme: *Jesus Christ – the Life of the World*, the then General Secretary Philip Potter invited Fr. Staniloae to share his insights on the theme. At Grandchamp, Fr. Staniloae emphasized the idea that the Logos of creation (cosmic *Pantocrator*) himself became the Lord (*Kyrios*) of history by encountering humanity in time and space, here and now. The *rationality* of the world is thus not a kind of physically or ethically static order, but a dynamic reality moved towards its finality by the Spirit of God. Within the flow of this movement human beings have their priestly vocation and responsibility, bringing creation back to God as a gift. This insight became an essential contribution to the vision of the Vancouver Assembly and was captured in the publication of the pre-assembly volume, *The Feast of Life* (edited by Canon John Poulton), the title of which was inspired by the work of Fr. Staniloae.

As I noted at the beginning, this second volume of *The Experience of God. The World: Creation and Deification* has its own methodological value. The *method* developed by Fr. Staniloae, and which has made its way through his writings into the whole of Orthodox theology, serves both to liberate traditional theology (inside and outside Romania) from several stumbling blocks and also to offer it a new direction. The content of the present volume is itself the best illustration of the fruits of this method.

Fr. Staniloae, for example, was not satisfied with a narrow interpretation of the cataphatic way (of coming to know God) as this had been presented by some Orthodox theologians, especially by Vladimir Lossky. The many pages which Fr. Staniloae devotes to exploring the epistemological values of both of the "ways" – the apophatic (or negative) and the cataphatic (or positive) – show that they are not to be understood as alternative to one another, but rather as interdependent. These same pages in themselves constitute a quasi-anthology of the theme. Moreover, this redefinition of cataphatism constitutes a door that opens up an intellectual dialogue with modern society, inasmuch as Fr. Staniloae was also proposing through his writings a recovery of the theological quality of the *saeculum*.

Now, the *saeculum* is also fundamental to the philosophy of the influential Romanian thinker Lucian Blaga (a contemporary of Fr. Staniloae's), and this has led several theologians to seek here a possible reconciliation between these two giants of modern Romanian philosophy. In an attempt to link the two aspects (philosophical and theological) together (see "Theology and the Bridge of Metaphysics," *Ortodoxia* 2: 1990, pp. 175-180), I wrote in a survey of Fr. Staniloae's theology (*The Space of Immortality. The Eternal Value of Human Being*, Iasi: Trinitas, 1994) that Romanian theology needed both Staniloae and Blaga and argued that the reception of Blaga's philosophical system, while controversial, was inescapable. Fr. Staniloae's reaction was abrupt. He asked firmly that any form of comparison between their two views be avoided, and he never accepted correction to his reading of Blaga's philosophy, mainly because of Blaga's pantheistic conclusions which lead human beings to religious ignorance. Many pages of the present volume, especially those consecrated to the incrimination of pantheism, will help readers to understand Fr. Staniloae's insistence in this matter.

What is the meaning of the world? Any theology of the world has to recognize not only that creation functions as *medium* of the divine energies, but must also recognize the fact the each human person is a hypostasis of the entire cosmic creation. Fr. Staniloae rejected pantheism because it distorts the perception of God as supreme Personal reality and therefore distorts the *relational* character of his creation. In particular, it is the originality of Fr. Staniloae's interpretation of the *rationality* of the world that deserves special attention. God, in his love for creation, transcends any physical or ethical order, any impersonal rationality or restrictive providence. Fr. Staniloae emphasized that the "rationality" of the world (humanity and cosmic creation) was "dynamic" inasmuch as the divine uncreated energies bear an inherent relational sense and make possible the return of the world as gift to the Creator. By its very structure this theology provides the human person with freedom in God, which is to say, with progress in the knowledge of God and in communion with God, a freedom that is not secured by scientific rationality.

Another stumbling block for Orthodox theology during the period before the publication of Fr. Staniloae's *Dogmatic Theology* was an ecclesiology that insisted too much on the institutional structure of the Church and not enough on the Church's nature of *koinonia*. In the early 1970s, the main topics of theological research were related to ecclesiology, especially to the official position of the Church on various ecumenical issues. Several outstanding Romanian professors, such as Nicolae Chitescu, Liviu Stan, Isidor Todoran, and Justin Moisescu (the future patriarch) published studies of high quality in this area. Fr. Staniloae, however, was not happy with the orientations of these studies, which were all very much in line with a certain type of Greek theology then being taught in the faculties. Although he had himself translated the book *Orthodox Dogmatics* by Christos Androutsos (Sibiu, 1930), Fr. Staniloae opposed the subsequent publication of the same author's *Symbolics*, which had been translated by the future

Patriarch Justin Moisescu in 1956.

Although Fr. Staniloae was attracted by ecclesiological studies, he realized that they could become a trap. The alternative for him was to develop a new chapter in ecclesiology – the person in communion as fulfillment of being – and thus forge a link between ecclesiology and anthropology, which are then seen as interdependent entities. Accordingly, the main part of this second volume deals with the Orthodox view of biblical anthropology. In the prevailing Marxist philosophy of the society surrounding Fr. Staniloae, anthropology was the weakest chapter, where it existed at all. Against such a background he had the courage to identify the essential affirmations about the nature and destiny of man: in his source man is transcendent but, by creating him, God has committed himself to lead human beings to deification (p. 44). It is not just that man is created by God; man in turn creates the world, which is thus a meeting place between the freedom of God and the freedom of man. This meeting, moreover, occurs not in confrontation but in collaboration: "Neither nature nor God represents for the human person an immutable fatality, an immovable barrier; any situation can be rectified in some fashion whenever the human person encounters a merciful God" (p. 45).

The second volume also contains an excellent discourse about *communion:* genuine knowledge is knowledge in communion, love means living in communion (p. 179-180). It is not a human moral performance, but a gift of the supreme Personal reality eternally existent and continually communicated as Love. The destiny of man depends on his response to God's love. This response is a sacerdotal act because man is a priest of creation who transforms created things into gifts (p. 22).

A dominant trend marking Romanian theology for an extended period (1950-1975) was discussion of the *Social Apostolate* (redefined later by the notion of *The Church in Ser-*

vice – Biserica Slujitoare). Of course, this trend went together with a certain political conformism and with exaggerated emphasis on national concerns in Romanian Orthodoxy's self-understanding. Under the pressure of a totalitarian regime, the Church was in danger of becoming distant, blind, and deaf in responding to the needs of the people and in defending human rights. Fr. Staniloae's response to this danger was marked by a double polarity. The first polarity is to define the *World* as the work of God's love destined to deification, and this constitutes a prophetic challenge. Writing, for example, that God is not a God who merely preserves the world in a cyclic form, but a God who is at work now, in our time and space, and who calls humanity and creation to the fullness of life, represents a way of saying that the Church should not canonize any existing social system. The prophetic dimension of Fr. Staniloae's theology was clear: the work of God is bound up *par excellence* with the category of the "new" and of the "future" (p. 194).

The second polarity of Fr. Staniloae's response is a historical, pastoral sensitivity. In fact, one of the most inspiring chapters in the present volume concerns "Human Responsibility toward the World" (pp. 43-63). The chapter is consistent with his whole theology of the world, and it would, therefore, be unfair to see it as a kind of accommodation to the sociology of that particular period. In spite of all restrictions to personal freedom, Fr. Staniloae supports a positive and optimistic view of history – the place of communication between God and man. He strongly affirms the "indelible remnant" of the good in the human person even after the Fall, that "minimum of good left in him" (p. 168). The fall of man is not a tragic fatality because evil, being ambiguous, cannot stand on its own nor captivate by itself. Of course, man remains in an ambivalent state, preserving the knowledge of evil within himself, namely a "complex understanding of this sad knowledge of good and evil" (p. 138), but he is also able to penetrate the opacity of the world by means of "another kind of knowledge" (p. 140). (It would be interesting to compare the opinions of Fr. Dumitru Staniloae here with those of Fr. Justin Popovic on *evil and its powers* in history).

A few concluding remarks. First, a great deal of political writing has been published about the silence and stagnation of Orthodox theology during the period of the totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe. The theological work of Fr. Staniloae constitutes the best evidence against such a generalized opinion. In the midst of the prevailing constraints and restrictions, he provided a broad basis for pursuing an intellectual dialogue with modern society, especially in the area of the humanities, and armed with such a perspective, he went beyond a mere cultural or sociological understanding of Orthodoxy. Because each generation – and not just that of St. Maximus the Confessor – has its own *Ambigua*, the theological heritage too must submit to the hermeneutic of renewal and development, which in turn leads to a new form of transmission – Tradition. For Fr. Staniloae, this exegetical openness of the Tradition is the genius of Orthodoxy.

Secondly, Fr. Staniloae was convinced that any theological development of the theme of the *World* represents in fact a new discovery of the active presence of God in human history and cosmic creation. Theological reflection leads to the experience of God, and vice-versa. Theology is a witness to the presence of God, and it implies a moral and spiritual responsibility. Thus, the Christian sense of responsibility toward the world required a methodological shift: the connection between ecclesiology and anthropology had to be recovered.

Finally, according to Fr. Staniloae, a reflection on the *World* constitutes a common theological ground for and a point of entry into ecumenical witness and action. In his critique of scientific rationality, he quotes evenhandedly authors as diverse as Nellas, Rahner, Moltmann, and Albrecht, and the whole volume, even in its apologetical elements, has a very positive tone and intention. The polemic and overly schematic comparisons of interconfessional positions, which had been a marked feature in much of Romanian theological literature, including even some of Fr. Staniloae's own earlier writings, did not surface here. Theological discourse had to be liberated from all forms of disconnection, and Fr. Staniloae's name has thus enriched the constellation of ecumenical pilgrims of our century (see: *Ecumenical Pilgrims,* Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994, pp. 226-230).

A word of gratitude should be addressed to Fr. Ioan Ionita and Fr. Robert Barringer for their excellent work of translating and editing. Theirs is a translation made with great sacrifice, the result of an exhaustive exploration of the original text in Romanian, and they have succeeded in giving the most intelligent and accurate sense of the text without compromising the source. The present volume is a work of Fr. Staniloae's disciples who share with him the same vision. It is to be hoped that this continuing translation of his *Dogmatic Theology* will facilitate numerous studies on the richness of Eastern Tradition.

Fr. Prof. Ion Bria

One

CREATION: THE VISIBLE WORLD

HUMAN SOLIDARITY WITH NATURE

The economy of God, that is, his plan with regard to the world, consists in the deification of the created world, something which, as a consequence of sin, implies also its salvation. The salvation and the deification of the world presuppose, as primal divine act, its creation. Salvation and deification undoubtedly have humanity directly as their aim but not a humanity separated from nature, rather one that is ontologically united with it. For nature depends on man or makes him whole, and man cannot reach perfection if he does not reflect nature and is not at work upon it. Thus by "world" both nature and humanity are understood; or when the word "world" is used to indicate one of these realities, the other is always implied as well.

Western Christianity has often had the tendency to refer salvation to man as separate from nature. Eastern Christianity, on the other hand, has never conceived them separately from one another, although lately the West too has generally abandoned the conception of man's salvation as something separate from nature, and the school of Bultmann, which does accept this separation, is now rather an isolated phenomena.

The dependence of what is human on nature can be said to be a part of the nature of human being, the source of one part of human nature and hence a condition of the existence and integral development of human being on earth. Human being cannot be conceived apart from cosmic nature. This can mean that nature, too, does not fulfill its purpose apart from human being or through a human being who works against nature. Through the corruption, sterilization, and poisoning of nature, a human being makes his own existence, as well as that of his fellow human beings, impossible. Thus, nature is the condition not just of individual human existence, but also of human solidarity. Nature appears in a wholly clear fashion as the medium through which the human being can do good or evil to his fellows, as he himself is responsible for his own development or ruin from an ethical and spiritual point of view. Nature is interposed, fully visible, within the beneficial or the destructive dialogue that goes on among human beings, a dialogue outside of which no individual human being, nor the human community itself, can exist.

According to our faith, each human person in a certain way is a hypostasis of the entire cosmic nature, but he is this only in solidarity with others. Cosmic nature is thus common to all human hypostases, although each one hypostatizes it and lives it personally in a way that is particular to himself and complementary to that of others. A separation of cosmic nature taken to the limit between human individuals is impossible. Too great or too unequal a separation of nature brings about war between persons and indeed war within human nature itself or else makes of the latter its slave. Precisely for this reason, everyone is able to contribute to the corruption not simply of a nature that belongs to himself personally, but also of that nature which belongs to all. This points to the human responsibility before nature, one that includes by implication a responsibility before his fellow human being. The acuteness of this responsibility demonstrates that it is based on a responsibility toward a supreme Personal reality who is the creator of nature and of human being.

The impossibility of separating the human person from cosmic nature causes the person's salvation and perfection to be projected upon the whole of nature and also to be dependent on nature; likewise, it enables the individual person, through his diligence in seeking salvation, to help others as well or to be helped by them in his own efforts. Nature as a whole is destined for the glory in which men will share in the kingdom of heaven, and even now that glory is felt in the peace and the light that radiate from the person who is a saint. The glory of Christ on Tabor was spread out over nature too. Yet, for the eyes and senses of the many it can remain hidden, while nature can be degraded and affected by the wickedness of the few. In its turn, nature can be the medium through which the believer receives divine grace or the beneficent uncreated energies, just as it can be the medium through which influences driving him toward evil flow out upon him.

A further conclusion that results from the interdependence of men vis-à-vis nature as the gift of God is that nature has to be maintained in essence, not only in its elements, but also in its natural syntheses. For it is these syntheses alone that are fertile, rather than static and sterile. They are found within an unceasing fertility and bring forth for humankind the means of existence. As gift of God, nature renews itself continually in the same propitious manner for human existence, without ever being exhausted in this movement of renewal and fertility.

Thus, when nature is maintained and made use of in conformity with itself, it proves itself a means through which man grows spiritually and brings his good intentions toward himself and his fellow men to bear fruit; but when man sterilizes, poisons, and abuses nature on a monstrous scale, he hampers his own spiritual growth and that of others. This confirms the fact that nature is given as a necessary means for the development of humanity in solidarity, that is, it is a gift from a higher personal being who created it, along with humans, in solidarity. This solidarity has not been produced by the human being, but the human can develop it or weaken it to his own good or to his own ill, as well as to that of his neighbors. Its origin, like the origin of his own being, transcends his powers. But when the human being grows to the measure of the gift of nature which, in its origin, transcends his powers, that common origin that both have in God's exclusive act is made evident, that is, in his creating them out of nothing. If it were the case that in their essence humans and nature betrayed something that had its origin from within themselves, then our responsibility before God with respect to the way we behave toward nature and toward our fellow human beings would not be so total.

The understanding of nature as the gift of God does not mean, however, that nature ought not to be transformed. Nature is made in such a way that many of the things necessary for the human being are obtained through this transformation effected by him, while within this transformation the continually creative imagination has an important place. Only the animal takes its place totally within the framework of what nature invariably provides for it. The human being proves himself the "master" of nature in this respect as well, while nature shows itself a malleable, contingent reality, equated to the measure of the creative human imagination. Here is where the great role of human thought, imagination, and work enters in, for through these, human creative thought in nature is made real. Through work, moreover, every person obtains the means necessary not only for himself, but also for his neighbors. Humans must work and think in solidarity with regard to the transformation of the gifts of nature. Thus, it is through the mediation of nature that solidarity is created among humans, and work, guided by thought, is a principal virtue creative of communion among humans. Human subjects become transparent to one another through nature in this way, that is, through their thought and work applied to nature in solidarity, as mutual help. Furthermore, inasmuch as the communion between human subjects is maintained by responsibility toward the supreme subject, God becomes, in

His turn, transparent through the nature He has given, so that men might grow in communion through their work.

Work thus bears the sign of love among men, while in virtue of its tiring and ascetical character, work makes men spiritual just as it spiritualizes the fruits that nature gives them. Or, rather, it makes sensible nature spiritual, for if sensible nature were made use of without work, it would become merely the sum total of the means of a life of pleasures, devoid of the force of human spiritualization and removed from the influence human freedom has upon it.

Yet the power of the human being to transform nature – through the action he conceives and through the work by which he meets with nature as gift – is itself nourished from the incomparably greater power of the action of the one who created this gift, who in his turn did not transform nature already given but created it out of nothing. Even with its limited effects, the work man performs on nature in order to make of it in his turn a gift to others recalls the creative act of God whose complete gift is nature. It is from the creative power of God who created the world out of nothing that the limited creative power that the human person has over nature takes its origin. The limited creation belonging to human person is based on God's act of creation from nothing.

On the other hand, in the human consciousness and in the love for his fellow humans that is manifested in any work performed upon nature, a thirst for knowledge and unlimited transformation of nature exists. Nature itself proves itself to have been made for the sake of consciousness, not consciousness for the sake of nature. Nature shows itself as a rationality that has been molded materially, and that can, in principle, be molded endlessly by consciousness and transferred completely into the contents of the loving human consciousness that passes between human beings.

In all these ways, consciousness and nature recall the existence of an eternal consciousness which, from eternity, contains in act not only the whole rational fabric of nature as this can be given an endless variety of rational forms, but also the power to give actual material form to nature and hence to create it out of nothing and to mold it until it has been wholly overwhelmed by spirit. This eternal consciousness thereby satisfies the thirst human consciousness has for a complete overwhelming of nature by the human spirit in communion, or for the gathering together of nature in the spirit, a state towards which matter itself – as objective rationality given material form – proves that it is destined. The creator Spirit brings about this work through the agency of the human spirit.

In fact, if the rational fabric of the world must have a subject who thinks it, a subject who is truly the one who knows and is master of the created world, this subject in communion is able to effect, even through created consciousness, the gathering together and transformation of matter into spirit. The creator Spirit who is the origin of the rationality of nature given material form and of the conscious subjects connected to it, is also their goal, a goal in which human subjects find their full unity in conjunction with that nature through which they communicate and which has itself been raised to a condition completely overwhelmed by spirit.

God's creation of the world out of nothing is made evident today in the very limitations of the world through which God himself limits us. But even through this limitation God helps us grow spiritually by putting a brake on our selfishness through concern to share fraternally with others the limited resources of the world and to give to others too the possibility for development.[1] Today God causes us to grow more and more into solidarity with one another and by this to grow spiritually through work and sacrifice. This is a new asceticism, a positive asceticism, spread to all and obligatory; yet it is not opposed to its older forms but can find its sustaining power in them. Our responsibility toward nature given by God appears today also as a duty to use resources sparingly and not to disfigure nature through pollution. This responsibility protects us from the passions and from seeking any infinite satisfaction in the world.

CREATION "EX NIHILO" IN TIME

According to Christian faith the world and the human being have a beginning and will have an end, in their present form or in the form into which they can evolve by themselves. If they did not have a beginning, they would not be from nothing, and thus they would not be the exclusive work of the freedom and love of God, nor would they be destined for an existence within the fullness of God. Instead, the relative, imperfect form of the world would be the only and fatal essence of reality. Only if the world exists from nothing through the will of God can it be raised – after it has been prepared for this in a certain way – to a plane of perfection in God, likewise through his almighty will and his love. This beginning of the world and of the human being, and this end, which is not a total end, prove the love God has for both of them and give them a meaning.

A world existing from eternity in evolving forms, in essence identical with the present world, would itself be the absolute, that is, the only reality. But the absolute cannot bear the imprint of the meaningless or of limitations, an imprint that the present form of the world, regarded as the only reality, does contain in itself just as it contains those other and essentially identical limitations in which all things come together and fall apart. Even if there were an unknown higher meaning within this relativity, there would have to be someone who would be conscious of himself eternally and superior to this relativity. Moreover, if there is no one aware of such a meaning, a meaning of this kind does not even exist. Yet our consciousness, the highest form of existence in this world, begs for this world to be saved from its relativity; it must find its meaning on a plane of existence superior to itself.

However, if the one who created the world is not superior to it, he cannot save it. The salvation of the world by God presupposes its creation by God. If the world is created, it has a beginning. This truth can be demonstrated in another fashion.

The world has a beginning because its meaning is fulfilled in the human person. The human race also has a beginning because it moves toward an absolute and brings the world along with it. Humanity is not from eternity, for in such a case it would not be moving toward an absolute. In company with the world, it would contain the absolute in itself and would remain within it eternally. "Nothing of what is created has the final end in itself since it is not its own cause either, for otherwise it would be uncreated and without beginning and immovable, having nothing to move towards... Nothing is an end in itself, for otherwise it would be inactive, since it possesses fullness within itself, and would always be the same and would not have its being from any other source. For what is an end in itself is also without a cause."[2]

According to our faith, the world and humanity are in motion because they are straining toward a perfect goal that they do not possess in themselves. As long as they are still in motion, they have not reached the perfect goal toward which they are straining. They sustain the motion because it was not they who provided themselves with it. Nor do they have perfection in themselves, but they have received the motion from the cause that brought them into existence. But that cause has not brought them into existence in the fullness within which it itself exists, for to have the infinite God create another infinite one besides himself would be a contradiction. Yet God does exert upon the world and upon humans the attraction of the fullness toward which they are striving and of which they will in the end partake, not by means of their own nature but by means of that communion in which humans will make themselves worthy to share through his free effort to advance toward it. This means that the eternal God takes up a position in connection with the temporary world and remains in connection with it. Hence, the state of becoming, or the temporary state in which creation is placed because of the "beginning" which has been given to it remains connected with eternity. God has come down to its temporal level without ceasing to remain always within the eternity toward which he wishes to raise the world.[3]

When the creative act is produced and creation appears, the expression "in the beginning" indicates the first union of the eternity of God with time. "In the beginning" means both the beginning of God's coming down to meet time and also the beginning of time, which takes its being through the creative power of the God who has thus come down; "in the beginning" is the first moment of the dialogue between the God who has come down to creation and the creation which is beginning along its path through time. Both St. Basil the Great and St. Gregory of Nyssa have noticed this, making use of Plato's remarkable notations concerning the expression *exaiphnes* (all at once, suddenly).[4] "For them [the fathers] the 'in the beginning' of Genesis is 'suddenly' at the limit (in the geometric sense) of eternity and time, that is to say, as St. Basil very subtly showed, a kind of moment, atemporal in itself, whose creative explosion nevertheless gives rise to time: a point where, we might say, the divine will touches that which henceforward – as it passes from non-being to being – takes its beginning, and without ceasing to begin, becomes and endures."[5] Here is what St. Basil said:

> Perhaps these words "In the beginning God created" signify the rapid and imperceptible moment of creation. The beginning, in effect, is indivisible and instantaneous. The beginning of the road is not yet the road, and that of the house is not yet the house; so the beginning of time is not yet time and not even the least particle of it. If some objector tells us that the beginning is a time, he ought then, as he knows well, to submit it to the division of time – a beginning, a middle and an

> end. Now it is ridiculous to imagine a beginning of a beginning. Further, if we divide the beginning into two, we make two instead of one, or rather make several; we really make an infinity, for all that which is divided is divisible to the infinite. Thus then, if it is said, "In the beginning God created," it is to teach us that at the will of God the world arose in an atemporal manner (ἀχϱόνως)."[6]

"In the beginning" [*par excellence*] suddenly the consent of the divine will which is above time meets the aspiration of the first moment of time, of the created existence in such a way that only the first one can be called "beginning." "[The Maker of the universe] needed *only the impulse of His will* [τῇ ϱόπῇ τοῦ θελήματος μόνῃ] to bring the immensities of the visible world into being."[7] The "suddenly/all at once" of the world is the "all at once" of the divine will that the world should be. God produces in himself an "all at once" of his own will that gives rise to time, the time with which the world is linked. The "consent"of the divine will is God's acceptance of the relationship with time, and it is precisely through this that time receives existence. Through the "all at once" of the divine will the origin of time is posited in the divine will and time is seen to exist only through its relation with the will of God, which is above time. Time does not exist by itself from eternity apart from the divine will but takes its origin in the divine will in a "once for all/all at once" of the consent of this will.

Time does not only begin by virtue of the divine will; it also endures. God has not come down into relationship with time only to bring about its "beginning." There would be no point to bringing about that beginning on its own if time itself were not to be. For the "beginning" of time means the "beginning" of created things in their potentiality, as time does not exist where things are not in motion, and there would be no point to bringing created things into potential existence if that existence were to be only momentary. "Beginning" implies the entire distance through time (between the beginning and the end), which the created world must cover, as well as the will of God to be in continuous relationship with the world so as to bring it to the end willed by him. The divine act whereby the beginning of time or of the created world is willed implies in itself the willing of time or of the created world to its end as one whole, an "aeon" or "age." Moreover, this act of willing the beginning time, because it is the start of God's act of coming down into the world that is beginning, also implies that this coming down of God into relation with the entire movement of the world in time will be continuously maintained.

The time that follows upon the beginning, or the world that unfolds out of its potency, does not endure by itself any more than the "beginning" appears by itself. St. Basil says: "Since the beginning naturally precedes that which is derived from it, the writer, of necessity, when speaking to us of things which had their origin in time, puts at the head of his narrative these words: 'In the beginning God created.' "[8]

Just as the beginning of time or of the world does not spring forth from some impersonal power that exists by itself, but rather from the decision of the divine personal will that posits potentiality in the world, so neither does the unfolding of time or of the world come from a potency of its own but from the potentialities posited by God; moreover, this very development is willed and hence sustained in its continuation by the power of God. Each time a new order appears in existence, God says: "Let there be...," thereby showing that he wants this newly created order to be and thus gives it a special power. Apart from the will and the power of God no new order would appear in existence or have its own place alongside all the others in the overall pattern.

An act of God posits within the already existing realities something that develops into new orders of existence. But in a certain sense all later realities have been foreseen in what was created in the beginning and, subsequently and more particularly, in the immediately preceding realities. Expressed in another way, what was created from the beginning was also created by God as capable of receiving the power through which new orders might appear. Therefore, everything comes forth from the will of God but his will also makes use of preceding realities. Or, to express it in yet another way, all things were created by God, but with a certain overall pattern and relationship among themselves. Thus, on the one hand all things can be said to have been created "in the beginning," while on the other hand creation can be said to come to a close with the creation of humanity. For creation does not reach its completion until, in humanity, God has revealed to it its meaning. Man appears only at the end because he has need of all the things that have come before him, while all that has gone before man only finds its meaning in him. The successive appearance of other humans from the first human is no longer a creation like that in the beginning, for all remains on the same plane. On the other hand, however, each human soul is a new reality, for each human being is created within a real dialogue between God and the parents.

Nevertheless, even in the case of the first human, the human soul no longer comes forth from the potency formerly posited within the world "in the beginning," although like the other orders of existence, the soul too is foreseen from the "beginning" within both a command and a power of God. The soul is breathed by God himself,[9] that is, it is brought into existence out of nothing by a special act of God. For from the beginning God enters into a direct relation with the soul. The willed relation of God to the world or to time – a relation which founds their existence – means, in the case of human being, a dialogue with one who is a subject from the first moment, given that both God and human being are persons, while nature as a whole is brought into existence as an object or as a succession of objects, only through power. God creates this ensemble of objects, however, for the sake of a dialogue with humans. Otherwise, their creation would have no point. Thus in the human person the plane of the creation of nature is transcended for the act of creating the human soul belongs to another category. In the soul the direct relationship of God with the human person – a dialogical relationship and one that gives spiritual life – is manifested from the first moment as an act of breathing.

In the continuous dialogue with humans who have been brought successively into existence, the relationship of God with the world of time acquires its full meaning. The world is offered to the human person by God and to God by the human person. The world is seen by God in the human person and by the human person in dependence upon God. The extension of the existence of humans – in the form of an unending number of particular decisions of the will that confront the world as object and deal with their fellow human beings toward whom they live out an unconditioned responsibility – shows that humans do not exist through the prolonging of the activity of an indefinite and deeper force, but through the free will of God, which makes a continuous appeal to their wills. Moreover, the world too is willed by God as a reality that serves the existence of humans as partners in the dialogue with him, a dialogue of unconditioned responsibility among humans themselves and also toward God.

God creates the world and time, and he remains in connection with the world through his will for the sake of dialogue with conscious beings whom he wishes to lead into full communion with himself. To this end the world was made so that humans could make use of it in their growth into communion with God. The world was created with humanity in view. The world has developed through the guidance exercised by God over its component energies, until the moment when, through a special act of God (the "hand" of God), the biological organism was formed in which there appeared, through the "breath" of God, a rational soul in the image of God, a soul capable of dialogue with God, possessed of a yearning for ever deeper communion with him, and to this end, invested with the grace of God or set in relation to God from the beginning.

Just as the first moment of time has eternity as its basis, although not the eternity of an impersonal substratum but of the will of the God who is from eternity, so too every subsequent moment has as its basis the will of the eternal God who sustains the world in its development and calls humanity continually to a response, thereby making possible the watchful and intense existence of humans, that is, their responsible link with eternity.

The world is not opposed to eternity, as Origen held, nor is the world in itself a linear eternity. It has its origin in eternity, is sustained by eternity, and is destined to become everlasting in a kind of eternity that is not identical with that of God. For the world is not eternal through itself, but through God. St. Maximus the Confessor, distinguishing the "aeon" (*aion*) from eternity, holds the former to be eternity filled with the experiences of time or time filled with eternity. There exists a final aeon, in which all time is gathered together, just as there exists an initial aeon, which contains in God the possibilities that have been conceived of all things that will develop in time. The atemporal laws of creation, the ideas of time, are an aeon of this sort. The kind of life that belongs to the angels and the future life of humans and the world within that life of humans is a final aeon.[10] It is an aeonic eternity, not purely and simply the eternity of God. This eternity is for the sake of the world that is contained in God; it is given potentially in the "all at once/instantaneously," and passing through time, is gathered together again in the eschatological eternity. The initial aeon is not in motion. In itself the eschatological aeon possesses the experience of motion and even a kind of eternal stable movement around God (as, in the vision of Dionysius the Areopagite, the angels also possess it), for the creature who has reached its place in God deepens himself forever in the contemplation of and participation in the infinity of God, despite the fact that he is always immersed within this infinity. That potential "instantaneously/all at once" of the first day becomes a complete "all at once" of the endless eighth day; the issuing forth from eternity through creation comes to an end, after the movement through time, with the entry into eternity through resurrection.

Lossky expresses this patristic concept as follows: "One must thus avoid the categories of time when one evokes eternity. If, however, the Bible uses them, it is to underline by means of a rich symbolism the positiveness of time, where ripen the encounters of God and man, its ontological autonomy as an adventure of human freedom, its possibility of transfiguration. The Fathers have well sensed this, and have guarded themselves against defining eternity *a contrario* from time. If the categories of time are movement, change, transition from one state to another, one cannot contrast them term for term with immobility, unchangeability, the invariability of a static eternity: that would be the eternity of Plato's intelligible world, not that of the living God. If God lives in eternity, this living eternity must go beyond the opposition of mobile time and immobile eternity."[11]

The fact that humanity, together with the world, feels totally dependent upon the will of God shows that humanity and the world do not have their source in a potency that is eternal of itself, and likewise that they are not from the being of God. The world is created by God out of nothing. The inner principles ("reasons") of the world that have been molded materially are created out of nothing but have as a model and are sustained by the eternal reasons (*logoi*) of the Logos. If the world had its origin from the being of God, it would be a partaker – by its very being – in his fullness, and humans who are linked with the world, would themselves also be eternal and equal with God; there would be no explanation for the responsibility humans have toward God nor for their thirst after an absolute that transcends the world. Nor does the world have its origin from an eternal substance that is co-existent with God, for then too the world would be equal with God in eternity and both God and the world would be reciprocally limited; neither God nor the world possessing the fullness. Hence, God would not have greater goodness than the world, and the world could not be saved from the absurdness of its relativity. Nor would an unconditioned human responsibility or any norm for such responsibility exist. Nor, again, could God imprint upon the world the form that he wished, or upon humanity a direction toward himself through the exercise of a responsibility. St. Athanasius wrote: "But others, including Plato, who is in such repute among the Greeks, argue that God has made the world out of matter previously existing and without beginning. For God could have made nothing, had not the material existed already; just as the wood must exist ready at hand for the carpenter, to enable him to work at all. But in so saying they know not that they are investing God with weakness. For if he is not himself the cause of the material, but makes things only of previously existing material, He proves to be weak, because unable to produce anything He makes without the material; just as it is without doubt a weakness of the carpenter not to be able to make anything required without his timber."[12]

The divine Spirit is able not only to produce modifications much greater than these upon the energy from which the forms of the world are made but also to produce this energy itself as an effect of his own spiritual energy, imprinting on it potentially the forms that will become actual in their own time, that is, so-called "reasons" (*logoi*) of things referred to by the holy fathers.[13]

THE MOTIVE AND GOAL OF CREATION

According to the Christian faith, God created the world from a particular motive and with a particular purpose. This gives meaning to the world. The fathers emphasized the goodness of God as the motive behind creation in order to oppose the idea that God created the world out of an inner necessity, an idea that itself leads to pantheism. St. Gregory of Nyssa declared: "This, then, whether it be God, or Word, or Skill, or Power, has been shown by inference to be the Maker of the nature of man, not urged to framing him by any necessity, but in the superabundance of love operating the production of such a creature. For needful it was that neither His light should be unseen, nor His glory without witness, nor His goodness unenjoyed, nor that any other quality observed in the Divine nature should in any case lie idle (ἀϱχὰ ϰεὶσθαι) with none to share it or enjoy it."[14] God created the world because of his goodness in order to make other beings partakers too in his intertrinitarian love. Dionysius the Areopagite said: "This essential Good, by the very fact of its existence, extends goodness into all things." Due to the rays of this sun of existence, angels and souls, and beings without speech exist. "And the plants too have nourishment and life and motion from this same Good. So also with soulless and lifeless matter. It is there because of the Good; through it they received their state of existence."[15]

If God created all things in order that they might share in his love, their purpose is to reach full participation in this love, that is, full communion with God. Again, Dionysius observed this very thing: "The Good returns all things to itself and gathers together whatever may be scattered, for it is the divine Source and unifier of the sum total of things. Each being looks to it as a source, as the agent of cohesion, and as an objective. The Good, as scripture testifies, produced everything and it is the ultimately perfect Cause. In it 'all things hold together' and are maintained and preserved as if in some almighty receptacle. All things are returned to it as their own goal. All things desire it."[16]

In the tendency toward complete union with God and toward rest in his fullness, St. Maximus the Confessor saw the meaning of movement and hence of time. Confining himself especially to rational beings, he declared that all of these have been brought into existence so as to acquire through their free movement or action the good existence and thereby reach the eternal good existence.

> As the activity of free will makes use of the power of nature, either in conformity with nature or against it, it receives the end of a happy existence or a lamentable one, namely, that eternal existence in which souls take their rest and cease from all movement. The eighth and the first day, or better, the one and eternal day is the pure and radiant presence of God, which follows upon the stability of all that moves; God will take up His dwelling wholly in the entire being of those who by their free choice have used the inner principle of existence in conformity with nature, and will afford them through their own participation that eternally happy existence, for He alone exists in the proper sense, and is good and eternal. And to those who have deliberately used the inner principle of existence in a way that is contrary to nature He will likely apportion an eternally unhappy existence in place of that happy one.[17]

The texts cited from St. Gregory of Nyssa and the whole conception of St. Maximus the Confessor underscore the fact that God created the world for the sake of humanity, and that his project was that the world be led towards the purpose of full communion with himself, in a special way that is by means of dialogue with humanity. Only humans can be and become more and more the "witness" of the glory and goodness of God shown forth through the world; only humans in a conscious way can rejoice more and more in the love of God and become God's partners. Thus, the world as nature is created for the sake of human subjects and has an anthropocentric character. Only in human subjects does the world discover and fulfill its meaning. For only human beings are conscious of a meaning to their existence and to physical and biological nature, and only they are able to go beyond the repetition of the laws of nature, as those who have the capacity to raise themselves to pursue and realize other meanings through nature.

Through its flexible or contingent rationality, and the meanings that humans can perceive through it, the world is at the service of this movement of raising ourselves to our ultimate meaning or, indeed, of achieving our fullness in communion with the personal God. All these things impose on us a responsibility before God and before the world itself, and it is by the exercise of this responsibility that we increase in our communion with God and with our fellow human beings as we humanize or perfect ourselves.

Two

THE WORLD AS GIFT AND WORD

THE CROSS ON THE GIFT OF THE WORLD

According to the Christian faith, the world was created by God as a gift for the human person. Life is a gift from God. Everything that the human person eats and drinks and the pleasure he takes "in all his toil" are gifts from God (Eccl 3:13). Wisdom, knowledge, and joy are gifts from God (Eccl 2:26). If the world had been given to the human person for the sake of knowledge alone, even so it would be a gift from God. But it is also given for the sake of his bodily life and for his spiritual formation in view of life everlasting.

Here God's love for the human person is visible. From this point of view, too, the world is a word or a coherent utterance of God to the human person within a process that is continually advancing and thereby makes its own meaning clear. As Heinrich Schlier says: "[Things are] the gift of the Word of God who enlightens life... But if things, all that exists, were brought into existence through the Word, then they are witnesses or signs of the Word. They bear so to speak the Word in them. By being brought into existence through the Word who enlightens life, they are in themselves indications, directions back to the Word and in the Word."[18] "The Cosmos can and must be interpreted from the Word."[19]

God shows us his love through the world as a gift, so that a progressive dialogue with us in love may come to be. Nevertheless, in order to achieve this dialogue we, too, must return a gift to God. Yet the human person has nothing of his own to give God. God rejoices, however, that the human person should surrender claim to some of the gifts he has received as a way of returning them to God. This is the human person's sacrifice, for while, in his greed, the human person can hold that everything God has given him is necessary for himself, he yet renounces title to some of those gifts. The human person thus shows that he recognizes that all he has received from God as a gift does indeed belong to God. In its character as a gift from God, the world shows that it is not the ultimate and absolute reality. The world is necessary for the human person not only because he needs it to be given to him, but also because he himself has need of it so that, in his turn, he may make a gift of it for the sake of his own spiritual growth. Thus the world proves once more its educative character for the human person. The human person makes further use of the world by the fact that he in turn gives it as a gift. Moreover, he does not lose the world totally in this act of offering it as a gift, but through it is enriched still more by the very fact of his own offering of it. "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Hence the human person is genuinely enriched not only through God's gift to him, but also through the complete dialogue of the gift, that is, through the reception and return of the gift. The paradox is explained by the fact that the gift received and returned draws the persons close to one another to such an extent that the object of the gift becomes something common and comes to be the transparent means for the fullest communion between persons. And not only is the gift something common, but it is also increased through the life which the persons communicate to one another through the love manifested in the gift they make; in this way the persons give themselves as gift, and through this giving they grow spiritually.

The things given us by God can become our own gift to God by the fact that in the return of these things to God we are free. We transform things into gifts of our own through the act of our freedom and through the love we thus show to

God. Having this aim in view, we can be endlessly transforming and combining the things of creation. God gave the human person the world as a gift characterized not just by a continuous fertility, but also by the great wealth of alternatives that man has the capacity to make actual through freedom and work. As talents given by God but multiplied by the human person, this process of actualization is the gift the human person returns to God.

The greatest gift someone can make to God is the gift of his very own life. Surely this manner of returning the gift means no disdain for the gift that was given. Where there is disdain, the gift of the human person returned to God would no longer be a gift at all. The returning of a gift in our sense implies appreciation for it by the very one who received it. Given that the essential desire of nature is for its own preservation, in the offering of our life to God, our will is making a supreme sacrifice. In fact, because he gives, the human person is accomplishing something by which he thinks he is enhancing his own being. The dialogue of the gift between God and the human person lies in the fact that each bestows himself upon the other. Even though he has life from God, the human person can make his life a gift to God inasmuch as, through his freedom – for he could hold onto his life until God takes it from him – the human person returns it to God in a more exalted service. Certainly this does not mean a refusal of the life received from God. Indeed, the one who offers his life to God does not hold onto it in a selfish way but gives it to God when this is necessary, or, more frequently, places his life in the service of God. On the one hand, through each thing offered to God, the human person gives witness that it is the gift of God and that he holds it not from himself but from God; on the other hand, he witnesses to the fact that he does not wish to profit selfishly from the gift of God by keeping it for himself, but that he, too, is showing his love for God by offering him at least what is in his power to give, namely, a part of what he has received from God himself.

It must also be observed that no one returns to God things he has received from him without his own work having been added to them. The grapes, the bread, the wine, the oil offered to God are more than just God's gift; human work has also left its stamp upon them. Obviously work is also something the human person does through the powers given him by God. Nevertheless, the human person can choose not to use these powers for this kind of work, a work through which he returns what he has received but stamped now with his own human impress and thus with their value enhanced. In this way he multiplies the talents he has received in accordance with the word of the Savior. Moreover, it is God's wish that the human person spends himself in the effort to place his own valuable stamp upon the gifts received and thereby makes of them human gifts as well.

Through the gift of the world, God wishes to make himself known to the human person in his love. Therefore the human person, too, must rise above the gifts he has received and come to God himself who gave them. As a sign of one person's love for another, the gift has imprinted upon it the destination that the one who receives it must go beyond. In a way, the gift is what the person who offers it renounces for love of the person to whom it is offered.

When someone does not understand this, the gift is often taken away against his will, so that he may come to realize that the giver is greater than the gift. Over the world and over our lives, the cross is raised in this way. When, of our own will, we no longer see God through the cross, leaving the world and our own life behind in the love for God, then he makes himself transparent to us through the cross against our will.

In this sense all things found in the middle between God and the human person call out for the cross. By detaching himself from them, the human person discovers God who is infinitely more than all his gifts. The cross through which the human person detaches himself from these gifts and the tomb wherein he forgets about them and they disappear lead the human person to the resurrection. Indeed, as St. Maximus the Confessor said, all things are intended to lead the human person to the resurrection, that is, to eternal life: "All visible things call for the cross, that is, the habitation to quench the affection for them of those who through senses are led to them. And all the intelligible ones have need of the grave, that is, the total stability of those who through mind are led to them."[20] When this movement toward them has been removed, "the Word alone springs up existing by himself as being raised from the dead, circumscribing all that have their origin in Him."[21] That is to say, the personal Logos who transcends the inner principles/reasons of things comes to be seen directly and seen moreover as the source that circumscribes these reasons, himself infinitely more comprehensive than they in just the same way as when we ourselves achieve communion with another human subject, the gifts bestowed by him are left behind while we rejoice in that richness of his that is much greater than these gifts. In this sense, St. Paul said that "the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal 6:14). The world no longer has for me anything that might attract me to it, nor is there any longer anything in me that impels me toward the world. The soul is fully satisfied through communion with the personal God, not through created things. These must be only the transparent medium of the personal God, signs of his love. When he himself is before me, I no longer have need of signs. Communion with the personal God overwhelms the presence of created things: "For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life?" (Mt 16:26; Mk 8:36; Lk 9:25).

By returning to God the gifts of nature transformed through the ascesis of our work and through the imprinting of this cross upon them, we sanctify them and remove the character they have of being an easy source of pleasures; thus we sanctify ourselves.

God gave us things as gifts, however, not only so that we might accustom our strength of will to transcend them for his own sake, but for the sake of our fellow humans as well, through our act of bestowing these gifts upon them. The love we manifest in using these things as gifts must be directed not only toward God but also toward our neighbors so that we might gain love for them, communion with them. "You received without pay, give without pay" (Mt 10:8). Strictly speaking, when we offer the gifts God has given us to others, we are offering them to God who has given them for the sake of all (Mt 25:34ff.). God wishes that the talent he gave be invested with the bankers, in other words, with those who know how to put it to work, so that it may be received back with interest (Mt 25:27). The gift given by someone to another is always returned to him with increased profit. The Savior advises us to make friends with the wealth that is not our own so that it, too, may help us enter into eternal riches (Lk 16:8-9).

The good things of God as gifts serve as a bond of love between persons, and hence they do not come to be like screens that keep them apart. Created things can serve, therefore, either for the perfecting or for the corrupting of human beings. Good things as gifts are meant both to serve interpersonal communion and to be left behind for the sake of that same communion. The road toward God passes through our humanization. Nor can there be any advancement in this humanization except within the human community, for it consists in the bringing about of a deep interhuman communion. Hence, created things are not given to us only so that each of us can carry on a private dialogue with God; they have been given so that all of us can take part in a dialogue among ourselves and collectively take part in a dialogue with God. Put another way, this dialogue is to take place among ourselves in the consciousness that created things are given us by God so as to be used as gifts among ourselves in his name, following his command, and out of his richness – that is, as signs of his love so that this love may also extend among ourselves. Their limitation, thrown so strongly into relief in our own time, shows that the offering of gifts, the sacrifice, the cross, and the awareness of insufficiencies are no longer merely conditions for any spiritual growth toward eternal life, but also for the very possibility that human beings might live together on this earth.

THE WORLD: REASONS AND REASON

The world as nature proves itself a rational unitary reality that exists for the sake of the dialogue among human beings and as a condition for the spiritual growth of humans and for the development of humankind. According to the fathers, all things have their inner principles/reasons in the divine Logos or the supreme Reason.[22] If the world existed only to provide food, there would be no need for its rational character. It is true that the animals also make use of the rationality of physical and biological processes of nature, although only for their unconscious biological growth. But if this rationality did not have as its purpose the serving of man, it, too, would be without meaning.

The rationality of the world has, however, multiple values. It is malleable and contingent, and the human person is the one who makes use of these characteristics and brings them to light.

The human person alone, by making use of the rationality of nature and its processes through the work – animated by responsibility – that he performs, rises to a life of spiritual communion and to the awareness of some of the more sublime meanings and purposes of nature. In the human person alone does the rationality of nature's undefined possibilities acquire a meaning or a purpose, or draw ever closer to its fulfillment. Only for the human person is this rational character of nature something useful both for his biological existence and for his spiritual growth. As a consciously rational being whose knowledge of the rationality of nature and its meanings keeps on improving, only the human person himself becomes more rational through nature, that is, he actualizes his reason to a greater and greater degree. By discovering and harnessing the manifold rationality of the world – freely and in cooperation with his neighbors – in order to make better use of the world's resources and to grasp its inexhaustible meanings, the human person grows in communion with these. Moreover, this process itself becomes a source that leads to the knowledge of other and still more sublime meanings. In the knowledge of the rationality of nature that comes through his reason, the human person discovers his responsibility to nature, to his fellow human beings, and to God. The development of this responsibility, moreover, is equivalent to the growing discovery of the meanings of the world and of human existence.

Both the understanding and application of the rationality of nature through the agency of a conscious subject as well as the fact that this latter can discover in nature meanings that serve his own spiritual growth depend upon this rationality being brought into the light and turned to better and better account. The rationality of the world reveals a meaning of its own through the fact that it is made complete by the rationality of the human subject who is also conscious of an inexhaustible wealth that is no monotonous repetition. This rationality is one that reveals, selects, and pursues higher and higher goals and advances toward these goals by making use of nature itself, not in monotonous repetition but by a continually new understanding of things, by a free choice of new ways among the multiplicity of those already known and by new applications of the natural laws in pursuit of more and more useful results. Through enriched thought and common work characterized by an increasingly marked responsibility applied to nature, humans rise to ever higher levels in understanding nature and in communing with one another.

The fathers of the Church speak of the eternal reasons of things contained within the divine reason, that is, in the Logos or Word of God, and include in their understanding of this term those continuously more sublime meanings hidden within created realities. Moreover, the fathers consider that with the help of the supreme Word, these inner principles are grasped by human reason, which lays hold of the reasons of things in the strict sense. The fathers sometimes distinguished the meaning of a thing from its inner principle or "reason" strictly so called, giving the name *logos* to the latter and *noema* to the former. Similarly, they distinguished the understanding of the meaning (*noesis*) from that strict personal reason that grasps the objective reason of the thing, although they did use the term logos for both these latter realities. We will follow this distinction and will in turn distinguish between, on the one hand, the reasons of things and the knowledge of reasons that comes through the agency of human reason in the strict sense, and, on the other hand, the meanings of things and the continually progressive understanding of these that arises from a cognitive act of a more synthetic and direct nature (intuition). In a way similar to that of the Church fathers we recognize a connection between, on the one hand, the reasons of things and the knowledge of them through the agency of a strictly analytical power of reason, and, on the other hand, the meanings of things and the understanding of these through the agency of a correct judgment that is more direct and intuitive. For even the analytical knowledge of created things opens up new vistas within the discovery of new meanings inherent to these same things. The world thus shows that it truly is an inexhaustible "light" – as is suggested by the Romanian word for "world" (*lume*) in its derivation from the Latin *lumen* ("light").

Analytical reason looks into the partial reason of the created thing and seeks to find the exact proportions of the elements that enter into its composition and the conditions within which the thing itself is constituted and maintained. Thus, all things and all the phenomena of their formation, continuance, and dissolution are strictly rational. The human body also has its own reason or rationality. Even the human being – as a being constituted always of body and soul - has its reason. But within each component and within each of its inner connections exists something that transcends what can be grasped by the analytical reason. Thus, into the very reason of each individual reality, taken in its entirety, there already enters a meaning that can be intuited but not known or defined in the strict sense. It is a meaning that is intuited ever more deeply and into which endless and ever new connections are entering in the light of which the individual reality itself is to be seen. The mind, or the reason as understanding, sees this higher meaning and every kind of connection between the different individual realities or units, and in its grasp of each unit the mind takes into account the other units as well. This sheds light simultaneously upon the more complete reason of each thing. Hence there exists a general *logos* of the *logoi* of all individual realities, but one that transcends the *logos* of all *logoi*. The more general reason is the meaning or the wealth of meanings of one thing joined to the reasons and meanings of all its components and to all other things as well.

Thus an inexhaustible common meaning of things exists, a meaning that binds them together, a meaning of limitless wealth toward which humanity advances. Their unique supreme meaning is the divine Logos, for withing this Logos are found the meanings of all things. He alone explains all things, and only in him does the human person find the meaning proper to his own existence. The one who believes is particularly the one who grasps this supreme meaning through a general act of intuition, that is, through his spirit.

In his connection with the reality that transcends both world and nature – and hence to the extent that he cultivates this connection – the believer finds still higher and richer meanings, indeed, the supreme meaning of reality as a whole and of his own existence. Progress toward these higher meanings and toward the supreme meaning is also a question of the will, of human being's will to develop correctly in harmony with all his fellow humans, with the whole of reality, and with the highest reason of reality as a whole. The higher meanings and the supreme meaning are revealed to the human person in conjunction with the reality that transcends both himself and nature, but they are simultaneously revealed as meanings that are demanded by the fullness of his own existence and by nature itself. In other words, in the light of the supreme reality, the human person's existence and that of nature reveal ever more completely both their own meanings and the supreme meaning. To the extent that he draws near to God, the believer will discover his own supreme meaning in the light of the fuller revelation of God. In the same way, he will thereby also discover the meaning of any one particular thing. According to our faith, the world is enlightened in its ontological relation with God, but it is not detached from God either in its existence or in its meaning. The meaning of the world is bound up with the meaning of God.

Analytical reason sees the world and each thing that belongs to it in a manner that is somehow separate. But in one who lives his existence completely, analytical reason is accompanied by an understanding that intuits the still higher meanings of things and their supreme meaning through the different achievements of analytical reason. According to our Christian view, reason makes progress in the knowledge of things and of the logical connections between them inasmuch as it is led by that reason or understanding that intuits the ever-higher meanings and the supreme meaning of existence. By the very results it achieves at each of its stages, analytical reason is convinced that it has not reached the final and total explanation of reality, while intuitive reason, that is, the understanding that at each stage is intuiting still higher meanings, urges on the analytical reason to further investigations, at the same time making it conscious of the fact that the supreme or complete meaning of any individual reality that it has investigated is a mystery linked to the mystery of reality as a whole and of the supreme reality, a mystery that it will never come to know completely.

According to our faith, when God created things as the molded material and sensible forms of his own reasons, at the same time he provided the human person with reason as the organ whereby the human person was to come to know them. It could be said, therefore, that the human person has what might even be the duty before God to come to know this created work at the level of the capacity human reason possesses to grasp it, for this work is the very thing in view of which God created the human person as one endowed with a reason adequate to creation. On the other hand, the human person is obliged to know these reasons of things, for otherwise he cannot make use of them nor live among them. But precisely so that the human person can live and use them, created things possess a certain permanency within the solidarity of their own inner structures or reasons, a permanency corresponding to the permanency of the human reason, which depends on them.

At the same time, the human person makes use of his reason to adapt created things to his many and constantly changing needs. He finds more and more ways in which these things may conform to his own needs, and in this very process he discovers more and more of the world's harmonies and of its further beauties and dimensions. Just as nature is in motion and the human person can turn its motion to good account, so his own needs are continually in motion. The human person discovers in this way the meanings of things which by reason of their continuity are, on the one hand identical and can thus be known in common, while, in their development and in the various aspects discovered within them, they are, on the other hand, always new, and as such can raise the human person to a spiritual understanding that is increasingly more sublime. The human person can achieve this inasmuch as the very components from which things are made are themselves elastic and mobile and can be combined in different ways – though always within certain limits – just as the human being, too, can move gradually without overstepping the bounds of a particular line of development. Thus, a certain elasticity exists among the ways of combining the component forces of nature, just as a certain elasticity exists among the ways in which the human person lives and conducts himself spiritually and physically. Physical nature and human nature provide a space that always lies open to the exercise of human freedom.

We cannot consciously coexist among things without adapting them to our needs and without making provisions and reciprocal promises related to the fact of our interventions into the sphere of these created things, that is to say, without discovering and bringing into act the common general meanings of things and of men. This presupposes both the rationality of things and also the elastic quality they have within the framework of a rationality that can be envisaged on a larger scale. Within created things and within their component energies, all is rational, just as it is between these same things. It is impossible to distinguish between what belongs to that plastic quality of things that is grasped through the senses and what constitutes structure or rational synthesis within them.

Within this rationality of created things, which is simultaneously permanent and elastic, and within the possibility the human person has of knowing and using this rationality consciously and rationally – that is, in a manner continually more adequate to his own constantly growing spiritual, material, and communitarian needs – God has interwoven ever new meanings belonging both to created things and to human beings. Inherent in the "reasons" of created things and in human "reason" are continually new "meanings" that come to light through the application of human reason to the reasons of things themselves.

Because human beings can conceive the inner principles or reasons of created things – in the unity they share with the reasons of their component elements, which are in one way permanent and in another elastic – they must also give expression to these reasons so that humans may communicate to one another their experiences of created things, and through them, commit themselves reciprocally to one another for the future. But it is in words that humans actually conceive and express the reasons of things, for through creation by the supreme Personal reality these inner principles are bestowed as things thought of beforehand by God or as things he created, coming down as he did by the very act of conceiving them to the level of men's capacity to grasp his thought and will with regard to created things and to give them expression in their own words. Thus human beings conceive and express things because God first conceived them according to the measure of human capability; the conception and expression of these same things by human beings are more accurately described as a response to the thinking and "speaking" of God who addresses himself to humans through them. According to our faith, human thinking would have no content at all had God not first created the things conceived by him at the level of human understanding, or had the created things themselves not possessed a spoken content already given, or had God not given them plastic expression by creating them, or, did God himself by this means not demand of humans that they grasp what he conceived and spoke in his addressing them and what he still speaks to them through the continuously new situations they find themselves in through his will.

The rationality of the world exists for the sake of the human person and has its culmination in the human person; the human person does not exist for the sake of the rationality of the world. It was a personal God who had the human person in view when the world was created. But just as the knowledge of things progresses and grows more sophisticated, so too does language progress in richness and nuance. This progress moves toward the infinity of the divine Word in whom are comprised in an undifferentiated way the infinite roots, that is to say, the meanings of created things.

Through created things God has given humans two gifts: first, the possibility to think and to speak, for this arises from the very fact that God conceived the inner principles of things and posited them in existence, having created for them beforehand a material covering adapted to the level of humanity; and second, the need to conceive and express these inner principles so as to be able to make use of them in reciprocal human relationships and in this way bring about that dialogue between themselves and God, which God himself willed to have with them, so that human beings might respond to God through their own thinking and speaking. It is precisely in this that all things find their meaning. The human person discovers ever new alternative dimensions of creative things not only through his own reason and new combinations and uses of the things themselves, but also through the feelings and continual new thoughts his body produces in its contact with things and through the ever changing relationships between himself and his neighbors, which use created things as their medium. All this must be expressed and communicated by means of a language that is continually being enriched.

This is how we are to understand the words of Genesis: "So out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called every living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field" (Gen 2:19-20a). Thus God himself has asked man to speak inasmuch as he urged him or put within his nature the need to discover the words that God himself communicated to man through created things, that is, the meanings given to things by God.

For this reason, even the words addressed to us by God through created things stimulate us to reach an understanding of them. Moreover, this very understanding calls forth a response on our part, for there is no word understood by the human person to which he does not take up some attitude and respond. The human person began to speak when he began to respond to God. Indeed, he had to respond, for God bound the human person to make response through the created things he placed before him; as a partner in the dialogue with God, the human person began to bring the powers of his nature into act. God accepts the names man gives to things in his dialogue with God because these names were given to things by God himself. Through the giving of names to things, our being began to bring itself into the act and to develop itself as partner in the dialogue with God. It is only within this dialogue we conduct with God about created things that our being shows itself superior to things as objects, just as God himself is superior to them. In this way our person is raised up to a common plane with God, as two subjects who speak of things as objects. For our personal reality also transcends created things, and through the agency of its dialogue with God, is capable of standing – in a certain fashion and through the divine good pleasure – on the same plane with God.

God does not infuse into the human person ready-made, however, the meanings and the names of what he has created. He awaits the human person's effort to decipher them, and it was to this end that he gave the human person his inner capability and need. These meanings and the uses made of them represent the passing into act of certain undefined potentialities, a further reason why every human learns to speak through effort; speech is not given to him all at once. Only thus are spiritual growth and liberty implied in the dialogue. The meanings of things are given us objectively, just as our capacity to grasp them is also given us. But at the same time, these meanings have something of the character of a solicitation from God to which humans must expend themselves in responding. God waits for the human person to discover the infinite thoughts he has posited within things and to express in his own words more and more of the undefined meanings he wants the human person to recount to him through the agency of the things created for his sake. We can form innumerable combinations of these created things among themselves or in relation to us, and through created things we can put ourselves in relationship to others in a variety of ways that always remain unforeseeable. By so doing we variously bring into act that potential power to speak, which has God as beckoning partner. The human person is able to reject the effort required of him to penetrate within the total wealth of the meanings of things and within those meanings that enable him to develop in the most complete sense of the word. Even in such a case, the human being would be making progress, but such progress might not always be a true one. God waits for us to have an increasingly better and fuller understanding of the thoughts he has placed within things and of the words he has addressed to us through them or is addressing to us through the new situations in which we find ourselves. The spiritual content of humanity can become still more fertile and more subtle as it is enriched by more and more experiences – gained in situations that are always new – whereby humans discover more and more of the aspects of things, attitudes, and possible human states, good or bad. The world continuously reveals these different aspects, different modes of combining the elements, and the various ways created by relations among humans and resulting from the relations humans have with created things.

Although Genesis recounts that Adam gave names to all the animals before the creation of Eve, the fact that the creation of woman is indicated immediately after Adam's act of naming the animals shows nevertheless a connection between the human person's speaking and his nature as a being in communion. The human person speaks because God urges him to speech by means of the capacity he has for this and the need that God implanted in him to this end; but the human person speaks because he thinks, and this shows moreover that the human person thinks not only for the sake of discovering, through his thought, the infinite God more and more in the work of creation – and so of praising God for his wisdom and power revealed in creation – but also for the sake of communicating with the rest of humanity and growing together in a spiritual way. Human beings cannot achieve full spiritual growth only in relation to God. Human beings also respond to one another through thinking and speaking, for God has implanted in them this need, and thus he also requires it of them.

According to our faith, the human person begins to discover the reasons of things by discovering their material use but concomitantly by searching for their higher meaning and giving an explanation of their use. The rationality of things has this double purpose: first, to be useful to man in maintaining his biological existence; second, and equally, to foster human spiritual growth through the knowledge of meanings, the knowledge of the ever deeper conformity of these meanings with himself, and finally, the knowledge of their ultimate meaning, which is God, who most fully satisfies the human thirst for ultimate fulfillment. The meaning of things is broadened for humans by the fact that created things make up the content of the thought and verbal communication held in common with others and hence of the most intimate general communion, of that accord with others that is brought about on the basis of these same created things and of reciprocal spiritual enrichment and union. But within this communication, humans also discover in themselves what it is that transcends material needs. They discover themselves as subjects seeking a supreme spiritual meaning to created things and to themselves. This communication itself reveals not only a permanent rationality, but also certain meanings of an evermore exalted kind. In the maintenance and increase of this communion, moreover, the created things themselves simultaneously and continually reveal new meanings. Humans discover that they, too, must act in a certain way toward things if these are to promote rather than hinder communion among them. This implies that human beings must not let themselves be dominated by things, with the consequent forgetting of their spiritual needs, but must rather make use of them with a certain moderation and train themselves to treat created things as occasions for practicing a reciprocal attention and generosity; human beings must see – in comparison with things – the infinite superiority of the person of their neighbors, and they must come to see the transparency of things. Thus, created things reveal the inner sense of certain of the means whereby the human person grows spiritually.

The human person grows in various forms of spiritual strength (the virtues) by means of a particular relationship of detached superiority to things and by the fact that he does not let himself be dominated by things in a selfish way. Only insofar as created things acquire a certain transcendence or relativity in relation to interpersonal communion do they reveal their increasingly profound meaning as well as the importance they hold in human spiritual formation.

Now if between the human subject and its content – formed from the inner principles or reasons of things – no separation can be made, and if it is by means of the content of these reasons that the subject himself develops, then created things as content of the subject are indeed necessary for the development of the latter. Fundamentally, it is through thoughts about things and through words that the subject expresses his own self. It is he who is "the truth." When words do not express his very self, they are false words. Moreover, created things serve to develop the subject, who, without them, remains a mere potency. However, reference to other human subjects and to the absolute Personal reality is equally necessary if the subject is to become actual. Where such reference is absent, the human person invests no interest in the development of his own character as subject. Thus, the very truth that is expressed by words, namely the true subject expressed through them, includes the human person's positive reference to the persons of his fellow human beings and to the absolute Personal reality. But in giving effect to this reference through words, the human person is giving it effect, properly speaking, through things. A right attitude toward things is thus a right attitude toward one's fellow human beings and toward God, and vice versa. And on this depends our own correct development too.

Created things reveal their meaning above all because their rationality is seen by the human person as having its source integrally in the personal God and because they themselves are seen as a means of God's love and hence as a means of the dialogue God has with us and we have with one another. Through this dialogue God leads us to an ever more profound knowledge of his own thinking and loving as well as to growth in our own thinking and loving within the relations we have among ourselves and with God. The dialogue with God through the agency of created things contributes to our development inasmuch as these are regarded as images or symbols or transparent types of the inner principles/reasons of God, that is, of the meanings God had in view through their creation, meanings through which he wants to guide us more and more toward himself and toward our own proper development provided only that we discover them and carry them into effect. Thus it is through created things that we grow, inasmuch as through them we come to know God's loving intentions for us more completely. As created things are better known, the wisdom of God and his love for human beings are consequently also better known, and as these in turn come to be known more completely, so do the deeper meanings come to be seen within the things themselves.

The fundamental meaning we discover in the rationality of the world is that this rationality derives from the supreme Personal reality and is addressed as to another person; in other words, God attaches quite a special importance to the human person. Rationality is the intelligible mode of a person whereby he communicates himself to another person for the sake of bringing about and developing communion between them. By the limitlessness of the intentionality he directs toward the other, by his endless love and unbounded freedom, the person is greater than rationality. Yet, these qualities themselves are not without meaning. Rationality is the mode of communication that belongs to the deep meanings inherent in love and freedom. Within the Trinitarian communion infinite meaning exists. From the Trinity, the Trinitarian will to raise up humanity into that same communion as into something that constitutes humanity's supreme and infinite meaning is communicated.

If communion with our fellow humans renders created things transparent and imposes on us a certain restraint and purification in our dealings with them, then dialogue with God and progress in communion with him do the same to an even greater degree, for they have it in view to guide us through the agency of created things toward the fullness of communion with him. On the one hand God asks of us a certain respect for things, and on the other hand a certain moderation in our dealings with them. Between these two attitudes there is, moreover, a close connection. Through both of them our spirit is not only strengthened and ennobled, but relationships of justice, respect, and love among humans and between humans and God are also promoted; this is evident when we take into account the fact that greed is responsible for conflict and imbalance in the relations among humans as also for their alienation from God. As images of the divine reasons, created things must not be degraded through base use and misunderstanding that give rise to dissension. And we do avoid this degradation when we are not led by the passions to become the slaves of created things, but see within them that divine meaning by which they foster communion. Their very rationality – which is not of our own creation – renders transparent to us both the meaning of their divine origin and the purpose they have been given to raise us up toward God. Moreover, their very meaning demands of us that we put the rationality of things to the best use we can.

The natural rationality of things is merely the first step on the ladder we use in order to climb toward their higher meanings, a process that corresponds to an ascent in the knowledge of the thoughts God has concerning us and to an ascent in our own particular knowledge and formation. This very formation in turn raises us up to our own new meanings, to a continually more elevated knowledge of God and of the ever deeper meanings of created things. Were we able to make a separation between the rationality implied in the repetition of things and their deeper meaning, then the responsibility to come to know them would be merely a responsibility to know the usefulness created things have for the body. But since we cannot make this separation, the responsibility to know them in the true meanings that flow from their rationality constitutes a further responsibility on our part, namely, a responsibility to form ourselves spiritually in relationship to created things according to the will of God without impressing any passion or constriction upon their meanings, and consequently, without casting them into obscurity.

St. Maximus the Confessor urges us not to inject anything of our own personal passions into the meanings of things but to strive to keep their meanings pure, divine, and thus open to the infinite. This is the aim of the purification of our thoughts, deeds, and habits in relation to created things. We grasp things in their pure or true meaning when we know them in their relation to God, or in the purpose within which God conceived them so as to help maintain and develop us as persons for all eternity. Hence St. Maximus the Confessor asks us to be on guard lest through any of the passions we distort this objective meaning of things. Moreover, St. Mark the Ascetic demands that when we catch sight of a created thing or when the image of a thing comes into our mind, we are to place it in relationship to God. St. Maximus said: "An impassioned understanding is a thought compounded of passion and understanding. Let us separate the passion from the understanding: the thought alone will remain."[23] And St. Mark the Ascetic asks us to offer to God as sacrifice "thoughts not torn by beasts."[24]

HUMAN RESPONSIBILITY TOWARD THE WORLD

For God the world is not only malleable and flexible, but also totally contingent in the sense that it is not necessary. Only in this way is it the work of his freedom and love. For the human person , once given by God as a condition of his existence, this contingency of the world is either limited or more malleable inasmuch as human beings, who have been endowed by God with freedom, can use it in a somewhat varied way but cannot dispense with it altogether. That is to say, man can, within certain limits, change the ways in which he is able to make use of this contingency, or, put another way, the latter allows man a use of itself in various ways. The total contingency of the world with respect to God is revealed by the very fact that the world was created freely out of nothing. Even the human person as a creature is contingent in respect to God, and in respect to himself is malleable or contingent in a limited sense inasmuch as he did not create himself, but can make an extremely varied use of his endless alternative potentialities. "Strictly speaking, for man nothing is natural, for he himself is not necessary. He is a creature and by this a conditioned existence, not a necessary one. He might as well not exist; and he might as well be differently organized. That he is and how he is are due only to the loving will of God. By this, the fact and the mode of his existence are based on the grace of God."[25]

By creating human beings, God has committed himself to lead them to deification. In his source man is transcendent, and yet his existence has been entrusted to his own freedom. He is not entrusted to some other reality, however, as though he were a passive object, in the way that nature is so entrusted, for man has the character of an active contingency, not a passive one like that which belongs to nature. The human person is a being whose contingent quality is limited and active, or rather, malleable in respect of himself. God created the world entirely contingent with respect to himself, while in relation to the human person he created the world as something passively malleable to human hands so that the human person might be able to exercise his own free and active malleability in relationship to it. Moreover, God has placed within the world large numbers of alternative passive potentialities so that the human person might exert an influence that would be in part creative even upon himself. The human person, too, has his own part in creating himself; he is not created by God only. And, in part, the human person also creates the world. He can freely bring into act some or other of the potentialities of the world, and because God assists man toward this end, God himself remains in a relationship of freedom to the world and in a relationship of free collaboration with the human person. Within the world, the freedom of the human person thus comes to meet the freedom of God. This meeting occurs not in confrontation, but in collaboration when the human person takes account of what is proper to nature outside himself and what is proper to his own nature, and when the human person is willing to follow the path of his growth into the infinity of him who is. "For how could anything from what is natural, or indeed nature itself, ever oppose the Cause of nature?"[26] Neither nature nor God represents for the human person an immutable fatality, an immovable barrier; any situation can be rectified in some fashion whenever the human person encounters a merciful God.

The malleable rationality of the world, which is filled with numerous potentialities, corresponds to the unlimited potentialities of reason, imagination, and the creative and progressive power of mankind.

For the fathers matter was an amorphous mass, completely unilluminated, and one whose transfiguration was hard to comprehend. From Greek philosophy they took over the notion of a matter opposed to the divine Logos, and hence to any logos at all. Some among them, however, such as St. Maximus the Confessor, attained to the idea of the reasons of things that had their source in the divine Logos. Today we see the full yet still malleable rationality of matter, its rational transparency, its capacity to be molded by conscious human reason and achievement – like metal to which many forms can be given – and discovered in its own light by that same reason. But this malleable rationality achieves its full meaning – through the actualization of its malleable quality – only if human reason is guided in its work by ethical principles, by a responsibility toward the human community and toward God. Thus there opens within the rationality of the world the perspective of a transparency and a transfiguration capable of attaining even to resurrection, for this rationality is overwhelmed by the light and power of the human spirit, itself filled with the light and power of the divine Spirit.

Adam and Christ are the types for the choice between these two alternate ways in which the human person relates to nature: the enslavement of his spirit by the sweet fruit of the sensible part of nature, or the mastery of nature through the spirit – not, of course, without the effort attendant upon renouncing the sweets of nature, nor without the effort implied in the sufferings of the cross. Only thus does the human spirit overcome the sensible part of nature and transfigure it until nature attains to the resurrection.

Hence, the passive contingency of nature corresponds to the free contingency of man. Through freedom man has command, in certain ways, of the manner of his own existence and that of nature. Through his freedom of choice, the human person is the image of God (who, as model, could have created the world or not created it), and God can be assisted in the task of bringing some or other of its potentialities into act.

Plants and to a certain extent animals can live within a nature that unfolds according to the laws of repetition. Human beings, who in a conscious manner and within a conscious community continually pursue higher meanings in their lives, freely adapt the laws of nature to these meanings. Nature proves itself capable of being used in a conscious and elastic fashion through the multiple alternations of thought, which are passed through in the course of human work. In its potential quality of being flexible and contingent, nature shows that it was made for the sake of the human person, who is free and led by an ethos of progress into eternal communion. That is why nature, when it actually does become contingent, becomes contingent through the human person. Otherwise, it would simply unfold monotonously within the exclusive and rigid framework of its own laws. Into nature man brings continuously new solutions that are not derived in a determined way from the exclusive combination of a set of given factors present within nature at a given moment. The human person brings unforeseeable solutions and produces combinations of factors that would not be produced by themselves. He introduces within nature a certain freedom of his own, which is continually growing.[27]

This means that nature is structured in such a way that it leaves room for human interventions that do not take into consideration the totality of nature's exact laws and that these laws are not predetermined to yield the most useful results all by themselves, but instead find their wholeness through the interventions of human freedom. The meaning of existence, which human beings possess at one time or another – the manner of their spiritual lives within their social interdependence, the nature of their feelings – all are combined with exterior nature, or else they complete nature in a way that renders any real separation of themselves from nature impossible, or, rather, such separation becomes more and more an abstraction, something imagined and chosen by the human spirit.[28] Imagination and creative human freedom do not move in the same way as nature, although in most cases they neither contradict nor suppress the effects produced by the laws of nature, but instead make use of them in one way or another.

The model of this wholeness is taken from the symbiosis that exists between the spiritual life, full of meanings and conscious feelings, and the physical-chemical laws of the body. The former does not abolish the latter but raises them to a plane where they are experienced spiritually. Nor do the latter abolish the former but constitute instead the foundation for the possibility of the spiritual life. The entire reality of the world is raised up to that plane where it is experienced in feelings and understood in meanings, while these in turn guide men in the moral and efficient attitudes, decisions, and responsibilities they adopt toward the world.

We are, thus, forced to conclude that the laws possess within themselves an elastic or contingent possibility that is placed at man's disposal so that he might actualize that possibility in various ways consonant with the needs and the content of meanings he has attained.

In order to understand this we would do well to recall the fact that all the forces and things of nature are a dynamic rationality molded into material form. Because it is unconscious, this rationality does not move freely toward goals chosen by it. The rationality of nature is only an object subordinated to the knowledge and guidance of the subject who is rational, conscious, and free, namely, the human person. In this respect the rationality of nature exists in solidarity and continuity with the conscious and free reason that belongs to man; the former has been created in view of the latter's intervention within itself. Moreover, inasmuch as human reason, in its full sense, is the organ for perceiving the meanings of reality and of human existence disclosed as continually more elevated meanings – and, in the last analysis, for perceiving the supreme reason of reality and of human existence, the rationality of nature serves the progress human reason is making toward the supreme meaning, hiding as it does within itself the possibility of being understood by human reason within the framework of those same continually more elevated meanings and of being actualized by reason in ways that stand ever more ready to serve them.

When human beings rise to the understanding of the meaning of human fraternity and of their reciprocal responsibility, they are thereby made to discover in the possibilities that rationality and the laws of nature afford what serves this fraternity and responsibility more completely. This is precisely what gives birth to technology that can bring human beings closer to one another and satisfy the needs of all more entirely.

We can say in general that progress in humanity (that is to say, progress in the most authentic cognitive rationality, which is identical with progress in the knowledge of the meaning of human existence) takes place simultaneously with progress in the authentic knowledge of rationality, which is to say, of the meaning of nature as an object of human cognitive rationality. It is in this way, therefore, that more and more of the very meaning of the rationality of nature becomes known.

The contingency of the rationality of nature is at the service of the process of the human person becoming what he is, his humanization, and this is so because of the fact that humanization is bound up with ever deeper communion among the human beings. The contingency of nature is anthropocentric.

According to our faith, all the many aspects of the world, that is, the actualized images of its contingent richness – for these have been discovered by the various forms of human culture in a way that corresponds to the multiple meanings of existence through which humankind has passed or is still passing – seem destined to be preserved or harmonized in a still more complex and more comprehensive image until the all-comprehensive image that corresponds to the all-comprehensive meaning that the human person will reach in his union with the infinite God is achieved. The contribution made by spiritual human beings, by the great creators of art, the scholars, and by many just views and experiences of peoples and individuals – all these will remain inscribed on this final all-comprehensive image of reality and of human existence, filled in its entirety with the infinite God. Moreover, these images, called to be concentrated within a single whole of unlimited complexity, are not only actualizations of those potencies given in the world and in the human spirit, but also represent levels toward which the world rises in an act of transcendence, assisted by the infinite transcendence of God.

The transcending of every one-sided image and of all such images taken together proceeds from the intuition of a perfection found beyond created things, a perfection in which these images have their source and toward which they tend, assisted by that final goal itself. The forms and levels of the very process of humanization – forms that human beings first desire and then leave behind, under their impulse, they bring into reality other images of the world – have their origin in the communion of a supreme interpersonal love and are advancing toward a perfect communion in the power and after the likeness of that love. Thus, the rationality of nature finds its supreme fulfillment through bringing into reality the ultimate meaning of human existence, which lies in that union with God, who is – as St. Maximus the Confessor declared – the supreme meaning, the supreme reason beyond all reason.

Schulte-Vieting says, moreover, that the simple orientation of human attitudes and activities following an immanent norm that sees nothing beyond humanity can neither explain, deepen, nor establish any basis for that responsibility by which human beings feel themselves mastered, nor can it supply the strength behind that need to pass continually beyond the meanings of existence and the images of the world to which human beings attain one after the other. These meanings and images can only be transcended for other meanings and other images when the responsibility that animates the continual ascent of humanity finds its nourishment from the perspective of the absolute.[29] A trascending of nature within the human being is produced, which does not owe its origin to him alone, much less to nature alone.[30]

Christians hold that without spirit the world would be enclosed within the automatic repetition of certain monotonous cycles – larger or smaller in size. Only the spirit, through the agency of its own freedom, leaves such repetition behind and can cause nature to leave it behind as well. Work has the decisive role in the transforming of nature, yet work is a quality belonging to the human person as a thinking being. The human spirit can act in this way due to the fact that through its body, it is also inserted within the material order of the world. The human spirit has at its disposal the capacity to make certain alternative decisions and even to transcend its own self, while through its body, it is able to imprint these decisions even upon the external world. The key to the human role in this process lies in the mysterious insertion of the spirit within the material world by means of the physical body. The entire world senses the fact that it is inserted within the spirit through the medium of the human body. It is only through the body, by work, that the human person can transform nature. Decisions can be made in one direction or in another by the human spirit, but it is only because it is the spirit of a body that these different decisions of the spirit can be extended into various movements of the body and into the body's working activity where such decisions find extension through bodily organs or through tools manufactured and wielded by the body.

The insertion of the human spirit within the body is the lever which, by means of work, lifts the whole world up out of its character as nature subjected to automatic repetition. Within this insertion lies the source of the spiritualization of the entire world; it is here that the world proves itself to be truly a world that exists for the sake of human beings, and it is here that the world fulfills its own meaning. A ray of light is cast upon this mystery by the fact that the material world is a fabric of rationality given plastic form or brought into material being and having the character of an object that does not consciously choose its own paths. The human person, on the other hand, is reason or spirit and acts as subject, conscious of himself and of the world, having the capacity to make decisions and to move on his own. Consequently, the human person is also able to move the rationality given material form that belongs to the body and to the world and which, like a train following behind, depends on him and admits of various forms. Without that consciousness, which is manifested through the work of the body and comes from the freedom of the spirit, the world would neither be contingent nor display itself as such. But the world is contingent and indeed reveals itself as such because it is connected to the spirit, which has been inserted within nature through the body and through the reflective work of the body. The world is contingent because it exists for the sake of the human person who, on the one hand is joined to it, and on the other hand transcends it. A certain continuity exists between the contingent world and the incarnate human spirit.[31]

As subject related to that objective rationality, which has been given material form in the body and in external nature, the rational human spirit is able to set in motion – in combinations chosen by the spirit – those reasons or inner principles of things which, by the very fact that they have been molded into material form, constitute the world, just as this same human spirit can also change the direction of their motion.

According to Christian faith, the body is interior to the spirit in a particular manner and thereby participates in the life of the spirit, passing beyond the plane of biology, physics, and chemistry. In the body rationality achieves a particular complexity due to the richness of the spirit within it. In its turn, as it acts upon the body, the rationality of the spirit is itself actualized within a complexity of great delicacy and subtlety. Moreover, the sensibility of matter, attended by pain and pleasure already in the organisms of the animals, reverberates within the consciousness of the human spirit as a pain and a pleasure experienced by a consciousness of singular intensity. Yet, this sensibility, experienced by spirit and body in common, constitutes a unity and is itself an occasion for developing the rationality of the spirit and making it actual, whether for the purpose of placing this rationality of the spirit (experienced through the body) at the service of sensibility in a direction injurious to human freedom, or for the purpose of strengthening this rationality (likewise through the body) in order to reinforce spiritual freedom vis-à-vis the sensibility of the body.

The life of the body thus makes up a constitutive part of the life of our soul, the basis of which is the spirit. At the same time, this life is the first contingent object of the freedom of the spirit, which either allows it through the weakening of the freedom of the spirit to degenerate to the condition of a process that is all but automatic, or else imprints upon it an ever-increasing spiritual freedom. In the latter case, the freedom of the spirit is strongly exerted upon the world through the body, and the world is thus raised up by the spirit toward the higher aim of its union with the supreme spirit. Apart from a body, the human spirit would not by itself be able to move the world in the direction of the meanings chosen by itself, nor change its movements. Instead, these remain determined by causes purely intrinsic to the external world and extrinsic to the spirit. Because it participates in the spirit as subject, the body cannot be defined as an object purely and simply. The human body is not matter only, nor is it only rationality that has been molded into material form as object. It is matter that has been given the character of being subject, and as subject it participates in the spirit. In the reality of my body there is something that transcends what might be called its materiality and its purely automatic motions, something that cannot be reduced to its material properties.[32]

A partial non-objectivity of the body exists. If my body were a simple object, it would be as alien to me as external nature is, and it would no longer be an intermediary between my spirit and the exterior world. My body can never become a complete image of me as other objects can be, for it constitutes part of my subject, which perceives the image of those other objects. Neither can anyone else's body, participating as it does in his quality as subject, become completely an object to me. I can see the interior of my body or of anyone else's body through X rays, and therefore in motion, but I do not see the quality of subject that belongs to it and sees it as object. Together with my spirit, my body forms the subjective screen upon which are cast the images of all objects. But for that to happen it must at the same time be in relationship with those images. The body is in part subject and in part object. While it participates in my act of thinking and of perceiving all objects, it is itself also an object of thinking and feeling. I feel it as an object, and as participant in my subjectivity, it participates in the feeling I have about it as object. In it and through it I sense and I conceive the entire world. Pain is both an object of my feeling and a subjective act of feeling. Not only the body, moreover, but the world itself also participates through it in this act whereby I feel through my body, even while it remains an object of feeling.

The body cannot be understood apart from the spirit, which organized it and penetrates it, combining the reasons/inner principles of the various material elements into the system of reasons of the body through which the reasons of the spirit are made manifest. The body is continuously being adapted to the spirit, or is being stamped by the spirit in a particular way. The body is the primary reservoir of those countless contingent material possibilities that are being made actual by the spirit through the agency of an equal number of its own inherent possibilities, which are capable of being brought into act. Yet, apart from the body the possibilities of the spirit could not be actualized. In some fashion the spirit, too, is being formed through the body or receives the impression of its seal.

The body has been said to be the primary and fundamental image and sensation of all the images and sensations of the human subject. The body is not, however, image or sensation-object alone; it is also image and sensation-subject. On the one hand, it belongs to the subject who perceives the images and senses the objects together with the spirit; on the other hand, it is the fundamental image and sensation in which the other images and sensations are gathered. This same role is taken by the body in the order of action as well. On the one hand, the spirit is at work upon the body, and on the other hand, the body participates in the work of the spirit. From being active subject, it makes the transition to the world of objects that submit to the activity of subjects and is itself both subject and object.

This great mystery of the forming of the body as participant in the subjectivity of the spirit would not be possible, however, were there not a certain rational character to matter. The rational spirit as subject penetrates the rationality of matter as object and assimilates it within the rationality of its own body as the body participates in the spirit's subjectivity. The spirit brings this penetration about in yet another way by appropriating the sensibility of that rationality, which has been made material or sensible as matter. This in turn opens up the prospect that the entire cosmos – through each human subject – may come to have a share in the quality of being subject, which is to say, the prospect of the human person experiencing the entire cosmos in its reason and sensibility.

The body is a great mystery, and it must be respected as such. In a way, the body transcends our understanding and our judgment because it is created neither by us, nor by our parents, nor simply by nature. We have no right to let the body fall prey to lower impulses in the way it relates to nature. In such a case, we ourselves fall from the condition of being free subjects into the condition of nature and become slaves to nature. The goal of the body is that the human spirit should be at work through it to transfigure and render spiritual the whole cosmos, the whole of nature. The body must be ennobled and transfigured or made spiritual in its senses, so that through it we may transfigure the world. The model and the power for this transfiguration are given to us by Christ.

According to our faith, this process of molding the rationality of the world conceived in thought into a real world with material form results from an act of creation on the part of a supreme subject. This act is to be equated with the creation of the world out of nothing. Consequently, the process of materialization also preserves within itself the stamp of that nothingness and of its own dependence on the supreme creative subject. In its mystery many other mysteries find their explanation: the birth of Jesus Christ without the destruction of virginity; the spiritualizing of the resurrected body; a certain involvement of the body in our soul after death and before resurrection. For this process of taking on material form can move in the direction of greater subtlety or of greater crudity in function of the will of the spirit, which gives its reasons/inner principles a material form. We recall, however, that the creation of souls cannot be understood as a process whereby God gives material form to their inner principles, as in the case of material things. Through creation, souls acquire a real being of another order. In this connection it should further be specified that when things are created as molded material forms of their inner principles, these inner principles or "reasons" also receive real existence, an existence, moreover, which is distinct from the act of their being conceived in the thought of God.

In any case, the process of making the contingency of the world actual and thereby elevating the world into continually more spiritual states in company with humans who transcend themselves in the direction of communion with the infinite Person and in the direction of their own continual enrichment from that Personal source – this process is a work that belongs to the human spirit in the body. The world itself, apart from the human spirit, would not be able to break out of the rigid linear framework of automatic repetition. Through its own strengthening, which is identical with the complete liberation of the spirit from the slavery of those passions that automatize it, the incarnated human spirit can free nature, too, from its own automatic repetition. The incarnated human spirit is a mirror which, through the processes of sensing and thinking that are mediated by the body, consciously gathers within itself the reasons and images of created things and makes of the entire world a unitary image of its own consciousness. On this basis, the spirit – when it moves according to its own genuine aspirations and reason - intervenes in a certain manner in created things and in the forces of nature, combining and directing them, according to its own wishes, toward a transcendence that is good.

The contingency of the world and the insertion of the spirit within it, along with the capacity of the spirit to make this contingency something actual, would be devoid of all meaning if it did not lead to the pursuit of a transfiguring of the body and the world. At each step of his ascent, the human person impresses upon the world the seal of the corresponding spiritual level, or, rather in the human person the world rises to the spiritual level human beings have attained. "To him who is pure all things are pure," and the wise man gathers wisdom from all things (Tit 1:15). St. Gregory of Nyssa wrote:

> The operation of the instrument, however, is twofold; one for the production of sound [words], the other for the reception of concepts from without; and the one faculty does not blend with the other, but abides in the operation for which it was appointed by nature, not interfering with its neighbor either by the sense of hearing, undertaking to speak, or by the speech undertaking to hear... And one may have the like feeling of wonder also with regard to the operation of sight; for by it also in like manner the mind apprehends those things that are external to the body, and draws to itself the images of phenomena, marking in itself the impressions of the things that are seen.[33]

Since man draws into himself the representations of the world and its meanings, but at the spiritual level at which he finds himself, man also shows in himself the entire world as he knows it (which also represents the world in general) and as it has been given a share in his own character as subject and at the level he himself has attained. Inasmuch as man stamps his seal upon the world, he displays the external world made personal according to the measure of his own spiritual attainment. Man is everywhere. As he enriches himself through the agency of the world, he impresses a seal of his own upon it and extends the stamp of his own personality into wider and wider spheres. In the organs of man's body, the world comes to be seen as a reality made personal in a manner that conforms to man's spiritual level; the world bears the seal of the spiritual level of man's body. In his body man and the world are visible as the proof that the body participates in the human subject and in the world. In the very hands of man as worker and artist, the complex capability of the human spirit is visible, as are the signs of the things he has made.

As our being works to make the contingent world actual and raise it up, the fact that it is also inscribing a line of its own transcendence demonstrates that within this action man is found in relationship to God. He ascends toward God, and in this ascent man is assisted by God when he puts his faith in him.

According to Christian faith, if the world has a contingent structure that allows the intervention of human freedom within it and can be led toward higher and higher states, this means that it is the work of a free creator. If it were the emanation from some impersonal force, it would not afford the possibility for the intervention of human freedom within it. If the world is indeed adapted to the freedom of the human spirit, this implies that the world is the work of a personal and free spirit who is much more powerful than man and that human freedom can be manifested within a world that is given for man's sake but could not have been created by him. If the fact that the world is given for the sake of a conscious and free spirit is implied in its own contingency, then such a contingent character could find no explanation apart from a spirit who is not merely conscious, free, and powerful, nor existing only within certain limits, but one who is also almighty and who created the world for the sake of the free and conscious manifestation of the human spirit within it. If the world is contingent because it is adapted to man who is free, it is also created by a subject who is almighty and who is interested in man, and man is thereby called to manifest his freedom through the world.

The world is contingent because it has been created by a spirit who is free and almighty for the sake of a spirit who is free in his image, created, moreover, as a place of encounter between his freedom and the freedom of the one in his image, and for the sake of the free activity that the creator shares with man in the world. The world was created in order that man, with the aid of the supreme spirit, might raise the world up to a supreme spiritualization, and this to the end that human beings might encounter God within a world that had become fully spiritualized through their own union with God. The world is created as a field where, through the world, man's free work can meet God's free work with a view to the ultimate and total encounter that will come about between them. For if man were the only one freely working within the world, he could not lead the world to a complete spiritualization, that is, to his own full encounter with God through the world. God makes use of his free working within the world in order to help man, so that through man's free work both he and the world may be raised up to God and so that, in cooperation with man, God may lead the world toward that state wherein it serves as a means of perfect transparence between man and himself.

In this way a dialogue is being fulfilled within the world between the working of God and of human beings. God's work calls forth our own work as a response in keeping with itself. The work of God at times is helpful and encouraging; at other times it is punitive in a fashion that instructs us by disclosing to our nature ways of action that are new and useful. At times the working of God strengthens our own work and crowns it with success; at other times it blocks our path or brings failures and sufferings in its wake, inasmuch as what we have done does not correspond to the direction of our genuine development. God always makes himself known in the world, and known more and more, by means of an activity that ordinarily does not stand out but can sometimes be perceived as an activity differing from that of mechanical nature. Nature, too, is the work of God the creator and preserver, yet only as a framework, at once predictable and flexible, for the free working of the human person and of God himself.

Within the freedom of the divine Spirit there is provision both for the possibility of God's varied interventions in the world and for the power to render the effects of these interventions much more extensive, more sensible, and more efficacious than the interventions of human freedom. When we speak of divine providence, we must understand the operation of God, who at once preserves the world in its elastic, contingent state and also guides it – ordinarily through its own natural movement, but on occasion through direct interventions or through human action – toward its goal of being the medium of supreme transparence.

If man can only exercise his free activity upon the world through the body, the divine Spirit, as infinitely more powerful, can work directly upon the world without generally impeding the operation of the factors within nature.

The Spirit is also at work through the incarnate spirit, which is our own being. In this way the working of the human person, made strong by the power of God, is at one and the same time an activity of the human person and of God, a synergic operation. Indeed synergy is the general formula for the working of God in the world.

We cannot know in the end how far this operation of overwhelming the natural laws will go, coming about as it does through the working of human freedom, which is strengthened enormously by the divine activity, and so the two appear as combined operations. Hence, neither can we know how far this overwhelming process will reach even in the course of the present existence of the world, as, for example, in certain exceptional cases such as miracles, where the effects of the force of the human spirit are strengthened by the divine Spirit, or the divine Spirit is directly at work upon nature or upon the human person.

Miracles would seem to completely overpower the laws of nature. Nevertheless, in most instances they serve only to reveal to nature a window that opens out onto its own most appropriate goal, a goal that the laws of repetition no longer allow nature to reach due to the weakening of the spirit. St. Maximus the Confessor expressed all this in the idea that miracles represent not a change but a renewal of that mode in which the reason/inner principle of human nature or of nature in general comes to fulfillment. For no contradiction exists between created nature and the powers of God who is perfecting his creation, just as no contradiction exists between nature and what is above nature.[34]

The consequences of sin make it impossible for nature to reach its ultimate goal in the course of life on earth even in those who, after the coming of Christ, are made spiritual in the highest degree by their faith in him and by a life lived on the model of his own. Miracles are treated as exceptional anticipations of the eschatological state, a state in which the order of repetition will be overcome across the whole extent of transfigured nature, and nature itself will thus serve as a perfectly transparent and elastic medium for communication among human beings and between them and God.

Until that time the order of nature that repeats itself in the patterning of its laws will be preserved, rather like a folding screen that we must be continually making transparent if it is to serve as a predictable framework within which we may plan our activity, but upon which we may also exert the effectiveness of our activity as it transforms and spiritualizes. Until this world comes to an end, the existence of its natural order will continually be penetrated in mysterious fashion by an order that transcends it, just as the spiritual life penetrates the more or less stable, and hence unabrogated, reality of life in the body.

Moreover, when miracles completely overwhelm this established order, such a phenomenon does not occur on a general scale but deals only with the respective object or subject at that particular moment. The world as a whole permits such moments within the immense ocean of its reality. In the same way that pores do not destroy the skin of the body or the transparent points or "eyes" in a piece of cloth do not remove the fabric itself, neither do miracles destroy the general texture of the world's order. These points/eyes, like those in a piece of cloth, attest rather to the presence of a more fundamental order that sustains the order of the world and toward which the latter is called. In its resurrected state, moreover, the whole cloth of nature will become totally transparent. At the same time this transparence will be of a great elasticity, for the rigidity we know now is sustained by the fact that all things are on the way toward death. The absence of death will mean elasticity and freedom, contingency in the highest degree, although the present images will continue within their own identities, identities they will maintain by reason of the profound variety of their spiritual reasons or inner principles. Their freedom will be enhanced, not prejudiced, by the varied communicability existing between them. It is not the living but the dead, after all, who have the greater resemblance to one another.

In the case of miracles, it is the human spirit strengthened by the divine Spirit, or the divine Spirit itself, that pervades nature more visibly with its power. And the more the spirit grows strong in human beings, the more it will pervade the entire medium that is nature, and within nature, first and foremost the bodies of human beings themselves.

Three

THE CREATION OF MAN

THE CONSTITUTION OF MAN

According to the Christian faith, man consists of a material body and of what we call the soul, which cannot be reduced to matter. The soul permeates the material body and is bound up with it, yet transcends its materiality. The human being demands respect as a being of inestimable value, and it is by reason of the soul that the human being is "someone" and not just "something." What makes a human being to be "someone" is this substratum endowed with consciousness and with the capacity to react consciously and freely. The human face reveals more than just material differences from one individual to another; it discloses also that spiritual substratum that is distinct from matter. The human being is thereby shown to be someone conscious and unique. This sustains within him both the will to exist and the will to be perfecting himself eternally, while his irreplaceable uniqueness shows itself worthy of enduring eternally. We cannot define this substratum in its essence but can only describe it in its manifestations, knowing about this essential fact, namely, that it is the soul that makes the human being a conscious and voluntary subject, unique and irreplaceable.

The body of a human being is a palpable, concrete, and particular rationality linked to the palpable, concrete rationality of nature. It represents the most complex system of rationality to have been given material form. If, in the first place, it is true that the rationality that has received material form within the mineral, vegetable, and animal orders has its origin in a creative act of God who, by the very fact of molding it into a material form, gave its own existence to this rationality – as to an image of the infinitely complex divine rationality – and if, in the second place, it is true that the process of bringing this complex materialized rationality into act serves to enhance its inner potentialities (for the process is continuously being directed by the influence of the divine rationality), then it is certainly true that in the human body this materialized rationality touches the highest point of its complexity.

The human body is a palpable, particular rationality because it possesses within itself from the beginning the particular working of the soul, an operation stamped upon the body with the entire complexity of the soul's rational activities and its forms of sensibility.

At death, the body as rationality given material form comes to an end. But the soul is not identical with this palpable and particular rationality of the body, and that is why it does not cease to exist simultaneously with the death of the body. For the soul – and it is the soul whose presence gives to the tangible rationality of matter its quality of being body properly so called – is a conscious rationality that belongs to a subject and surpasses the entire passive rationality and sensibility of nature.

Consequently, even as participant in man's free and conscious subjectivity, the body is not identical with that very rationality given material form, which belongs to nature in general. By the presence of the soul within it, the body is distinct from all material nature. The body is not a mere part of that materialized rationality belonging to nature as a whole; it is a human body permeated by soul. Yet, in nature as rationality given material form, the body possesses a reality that is in some fashion apt for transformation into a body capable of being made rational and sensible in a particular way, that is, of participating in the conscious and free rationality of the soul.

Through the agency of the body, the soul can gather together and exert an influence upon the world as a whole. Moreover, through its relation to the higher order, the soul is rationality, rationality that is subjective and infinitely rich. Nicetas Stethatos made this point when he declared that man is in the image of God in the sense that just as God possesses in Himself the reasons or inner principles of things before he creates them, "so man likewise has the reasons of things, and the natures [of beings], and knowledge [of them] within himself, as one created in the image of God to be king over all creation."[35]

Because the general nature is not the source of its being, the soul cannot disappear into nature simultaneously with the dissolution of the individual body. The soul is produced by the eternal conscious Spirit who, while conceiving the rational principles of matter and molding them into material form, also brings into existence in his own image a conscious soul. Such a soul stands over against these materialized principles but is connected to them and itself exists in order to conceive these principles and to make the material reality upon which they are stamped into a spiritual reality by means of its own union with the eternal conscious Spirit. Hence, the soul is created to raise up the rational principles of created things into their union with the eternal principles of the world conceived by God, and this is to occur within a dialogue of knowledge and collaboration with God.

This created image of the conscious eternal Spirit is brought into existence not simply as a rationality molded into material form and having a general and conceptual character, but as a factor which by itself – in the same manner as the Logos – is able to have itself as the object of its own thought, that is, to conceive itself and all other things besides. Here an interruption takes place within the creative action of the conscious eternal Spirit. It is not just through the simple conception and command of the creator Spirit that the conscious soul is brought into existence. Rather, since from the beginning it has the character of a subject, the soul is called into existence through a kind of reduplication of the creator Spirit on the created plane. The conscious supreme Spirit speaks with the created conscious spirit as with a kind of *alter ego*, though the latter remains created.

The conscious supreme Spirit can only have the character of one who is subject. The conscious created spirit is an image of this conscious uncreated Spirit, and as such it, too, has the character of one who is subject. But a conscious subject is always in dialogue with another conscious subject or subjects. In some fashion the content of the supreme consciousness is common, although the subjects themselves are many. The human soul is made in the image of the personal God – both by reason of its consciousness and also in virtue of its quality as a subject among subjects – and thus has a kind of content made up of common human consciousness. For the subject of the supreme Logos – he who conceives those very "reasons," he molds into material form as units of nature – possesses even within the dialogue he shares with the other divine subjects the foundation for a dialogue with created subjects. The content of the dialogue among the uncreated subjects, moreover, is the consciousness they share, just as the content of consciousness of created subjects – which, up to a point, is common with that of the divine subjects inasmuch as these impart to humans the eternal reasons of created things – is also shared among themselves.

The created consciousness, however, is brought into existence in ontological relation to that materialized rationality of the world which, after creation, the Logos goes on conceiving in an efficacious way and continues to guide toward the state within which the human consciousness will be able to exist and function. To this end the Logos also makes use of an impulse toward development that has been placed within the very rationality of the world as this has received material form. Creation thus attains to the state of complex organization appropriate to that of the body and suited to the conscious soul as one brought into existence by the conscious supreme Spirit. At that time the conscious soul is brought to exist through the special creative and initiating act of the dialogue the Logos undertakes with it.

The purpose of creation is thus fulfilled through this bringing into existence of the conscious created person, for the Creator also is person, and creation has as its purpose to bring about a dialogue between the supreme Personal reality and created persons.

We must make clear that however much the appearing of the human body may have been prepared beforehand by the way in which inferior nature leads up to it, the body itself does not come into existence – as body in the strict sense – before the soul, just as the soul, too, does not begin to exist through creation (itself also a call) before its own individual and appropriate body starts to take form.

For in the same way that the body does not begin to take form on its own or by means of some prior process, but from the outset has within itself the soul as a factor distinct from its own nature, neither does the soul exist before its body begins to take form. The concomitant beginning of their existence presupposes that both soul and body are very intimately interwoven, and this in turn makes it impossible to understand a soul or a body separately in itself. This concomitant beginning and intimate interweaving of the two factors must be admitted once it comes to be seen that the body cannot be understood either solely or merely as part of a self-transcending nature. On the other hand, the human soul cannot be understood before the body comes to exist, for in that case the body would not be a participant from the beginning in the human person's character as subject, and this in turn would have repercussions on the entire life of the human person and on his connection with nature: the soul would be kept within the body as though this were a prison and would stand before nature as before an alien reality that the human person cannot transfigure and that likewise cannot enrich the human person. This is what the Platonic/Originist theory holds.

The soul must be in the body from the beginning of the body's formation so that the body may have that special complexity fitted to the soul and provide the medium that is adequate to spiritual movement, that is to say, to the free and conscious thinking and willing of the soul. It is true that Genesis tells us that God first formed the human body from dust and then breathed the soul into it (Gen. 2:7). But we must understand this to mean that from the moment the human body began to be formed with the highest degree of biological complexity, it possessed within itself the soul God breathed into it, and it was through the soul that God contributed in a special way toward bringing about the human biological organism at the highest degree of complexity. This is why the formation of the body is treated in Genesis as a special creative act of God.

The creative activity of the divine Logos no longer consisted here only in a new impulse and a new power given to the general rationality of the created world so that the world might produce analogous new forms of his divine rationality, but the Logos himself entered as subject into a creative dialogical relationship with a created subject – the visible image of his own spiritual Subject – and brought the human soul into existence simultaneously with the body. In this way, the expression of the complete materialized rationality of the world and the quality of being a conscious bearer of this rationality were able to be concentrated within the new subject.

The divine Logos began to speak with a created image of his own as subject, as hypostasis, creating it or calling it into existence, and this created image manifested itself from the beginning in a biological organism that had begun to take form. The human person thereby stands within a conscious relationship and a conscious dialogue in order to bring about in the world every species of transformation willed by God and according to his own likeness.

New human persons are then born from a pair of other human persons through the power of God who enters into dialogue with them.

Because neither soul nor body exists separately, even for an instant, Christian teaching prefers to speak not of the spirit of man, but of his soul. For by "spirit," an entity could be understood that owed nothing of its makeup to its coexistence with the body. Hence, for Christian teaching the spirit is not an entity in man distinct from the soul, but rather, consists of the higher functions of the soul that are dedicated less to the care of the body than to a kind of thinking that is capable of rising even to the thought of its Creator.

St. Maximus the Confessor held that from the beginning man is constituted of soul and body, for from the beginning he is man-the-hypostasis, constituted of both. No part whatsoever of man-the-hypostasis comes into existence at some later point, for this would transform both elements when they are united, and man would not be man before their union.[36]

On the other hand, St. Maximus declared that the soul and the body cannot be united under the pressure of an exterior force or of any natural affinity, since in either instance their union would be owing to an impersonal force devoid of freedom, and in such a case, man would not be a free being. At the beginning through creation, and afterwards through birth and by the will of God, the soul and the body come into existence simultaneously as a unity, not as a unity of substance, but as a unity formed from both elements.[37]

The fact of their simultaneous coming into being as a unity, but not as the unity of a single substance, can only be explained by the fact that in the beginning man was created by God, and after that by the fact of birth from a pair of human beings existent as unities, which is to say, through the propagation of man-the-species, the propagation of human hypostases within the framework of this same species formed from free subjects. The mystery of the union of soul and body in the individual human being refers to the mystery of the existence of man-the-species as union between soul and body. St. Symeon the New Theologian drew attention to the fact that when Eve was formed from Adam's rib, God did not breathe into her "the breath of Life," for she was taken not from the unanimated body of Adam, but from the "animated rib," and "the first fruits of the spirit that she received together with the animated body, God made to be a fully living soul."[38] This does not mean, however, that God does not have a role, too, in bringing each new human subject into being. The very act of "drawing forth" Eve from Adam's rib is an act of God. Moreover, this act gives Eve her own character, distinct not only as to sex, but also as to the uniqueness of her person. It is this same thing that takes place at the "drawing forth" of every human being from a preceding couple.

The union between soul and body in the unity of the human person is a special mystery because man-the-species, uniting nature with the spirit, represents the free and conscious spiritual factor that has been inserted within nature as soul. This affords us the possibility as persons to make a contingent use of nature. The insertion of the spirit within material nature is so intimate that the human spiritual factor cannot even momentarily be conceived as pure spirit; it must be understood from the outset as soul or as incarnate spirit, that is, as spirit having its ramifications in the body, or as body having roots in the spirit. Our person is spirit that is capable of feeling and of knowing through the senses. Yet it maintains the self-consciousness and freedom and power of its own motion through the motion of the body, and hence it maintains also the power of moving objects according to its own will inasmuch as our person has the body as participant in the spirit's acts of knowing and moving.

The entire body is an instrument of an infinitely complex sensibility. In it, in an endlessly varied way, all the vibration of the world is felt, along with the forms of the world that are in continuous motion, just as the equally complex relationship of the human person to the world is also expressed through the body. It is the instrument of a sensibility and an expressivity that are inexhaustible. This sensibility, however, is conscious, and the development of this kind of expressivity depends heavily on the will. Through the body the human person interposes himself as a factor that breaks the connections between the processes of nature and sets up connections of a spiritual and moral character willed by the human person himself. Through the agency of sensations, the human person rises to those senses or meanings that are superior to the sensations that are rooted in nature, and thus he establishes in nature connections that are fitted to the senses/meanings he is pursuing. It is in the body that the spirit meets the world as well, the spirit that is endlessly molding the body to make it capable of laying hold of the world and also molding its own reaction toward the world. Furthermore, through the body the spirit expresses its own infinitely complex relation with, on the one hand, the higher spiritual order, and on the other, the order of the world, while binding the two together. Through the body the spirit raises the world into the higher sphere and stamps the new horizon of that sphere upon the world.

In the same way that the design and flexibility of the hand are of an endless complexity while they reflect a design and flexibility of the organism as a whole in its operation upon the world, so, too, the face and the eyes express in their own manner the endlessly nuanced sensibility and expressivity that the spirit acquires through its relationship to the world. And inasmuch as each individual represents in his body a particular pattern of sensibility and expressivity proper to himself, this circumstance cannot be merely an inheritance of a similar pattern of sensibility and expressivity from his parents or from his other ancestors. From the outset it is also the manifestation of a factor superior to nature and to man-the-species in general. In the body, the pattern of the personal soul is made actual – in part from the beginning, in part only gradually.

According to the Christian understanding, the human person is not a material body only, for as such he would not represent, over against the automatism of nature, a factor of creative freedom, a factor that brings the world as contingent reality into act.

Neither is a human being a juxtaposition of pure spirit and material body. A pure spirit juxtaposed to the body would keep the spirit from participating in the sensibilities and passions occasioned by its coexistence with the body, and moreover, would keep the body from participating in the spirit's quality of being subject, consequently rendering the body unfit for its own spiritualization and for its role as instrument in the spiritualization of the world.

Only as incarnate spirit, that is, as soul, does the human spirit from the first moment of its existence represent a factor inserted into the world (though remaining distinct from nature) and able to dispose of nature freely.

The fathers speak of the higher and intellective part of the soul, the *nous* or mind, in a way that suggests that after the mind has been freed from all representations and images of the things of the world, it knows God in a direct intuitive manner. Some Orthodox theologians have seen here a difference between Eastern and Western Christianity in the sense that the East affirms a direct knowledge of God, while the West affirms only a deductive knowledge by the way of analogy.[39] But this direct knowledge of God seems not to have been understood in the East as a knowledge belonging to a mind that is separated from the body and from the world, but as that of a mind sensitive to the fact of life in the body and sensitive to the entirety of experience in the world. This is the direct knowledge proper to the mind of a purified body, a mind that feels the effect of purification in its relation to the world. It is a direct knowledge that arises through the medium of a world that has become transparent.

St. Symeon considered the knowledge of God as a kind of "seeing," and one that is greater than hearing would be. For St. Symeon and other fathers, understanding is not conceived in the spirit of scholasticism as a deductive knowledge achieved at a distance, but rather as a contact or a "feeling" of the mind. The reality of God radiates a spiritual "light" that penetrates the human mind, just as created things radiate a material light. We have no longer preserved this sense of the "understanding" except when we speak of "understanding" our fellow human beings through sympathy. "When you hear the expression 'light of knowledge'... do not see in this only a knowledge of things said, apart from light ... for there is no other way for anyone to know God except by contemplation of the light sent forth from Him."[40] In the same way, however, that this knowledge of another's soul through feeling comes about for us only through the agency of our eyes, so, too, the knowledge of God through "seeing" comes about only through the mind being united with the body.

St. Maximus the Confessor held that the mind attains to the knowledge of God only through the "motion" of purification – a fact affirmed also by St. Symeon the New Theologian – and consequently not (as in the Origenist sense) by the refusal of all motion through the medium of the world. For St. Maximus spiritual motion through the world, and hence also through the body that is connected with the world, has a positive value.

That the mind is not to be separated from the whole person in the matter of knowledge of God is due also to the fact that the full knowledge of God is simultaneously a union with

God on the part of the one who knows. In this union, however, it is not just the mind, understood as a purely spiritual element of the soul, that takes part, but the entire soul and indeed the whole person. All things that move receive stability in the infinity of God. In God and in the understanding that is lived out by human beings, all things are unified and not a single one of them disappears.[41]

St. Gregory Palamas rejected Barlaam's theory that the mind, which encounters God, is an abstract mind, detached from the integral person. It is, instead, that mind wherein the whole person, made up of soul and body, is concentrated and vibrates, so to speak, in unison with the results of those experiences accumulated within it, but purified and made clean. He condemned the theory of Barlaam in this manner: "...to make the mind 'go out,' not only from fleshly thoughts, but out of the body itself, with the aim of contemplating intelligible visions – that is the greatest of the Hellenic errors, the root and source of all heresies..."[42] [Have we not been told 'that our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit who is within us' (1 Cor 6:19)?] "How can it be that God at the beginning causes the mind to inhabit the body? Did even he do ill?... As for us, we think the mind becomes evil through dwelling on fleshly thoughts, but that there is nothing bad in the body, since the body is not evil in itself."[43] St. Gregory Palamas did not speak of a body devoid of sensations, but of a body whose sensations have been purified, directed toward God. He treated the "heart" – where the mind (νοῦς) must gather itself in order to experience there the grace of God – as the innermost organ of the body, but at the same time he treated it as the center of the encounter between body and soul and as the governing organ (ἡγεμονικὸν ὄϱγανον). This means, that it is not pure intelligence that governs man or encounters God, but the entire man in whom understanding and feeling make up a single whole. Indeed, the integral reason of man scarcely achieves this wholeness. Interpreting the words of St.

Makarios of Egypt ("Therefore, it is there one must look to see if grace has inscribed the laws of the Spirit"), St. Gregory Palamas wrote: "Where but in the heart, the controlling organ, the throne of grace, where the mind and all the soul are to be found? Can you not see, then, how essential it is that those who have determined to pay attention to themselves in inner quiet (*hesychia*) should gather together the mind and enclose it in the body, and especially in that 'body' most interior to the body, which we call heart?"[44]

According to St. Gregory Palamas, it is genuine madness to let the mind loose in abstract thinking cut off from a person's integral being. A person who does so is far removed from himself, from reality, and from God.

In contrast with Barlaam, who sought to do away completely with the passionate part of the soul, St. Gregory Palamas did not seek the annihilation of what is bound up with the body (the irascible and the concupiscent), but rather that it be placed at the service of the good and of love. "Impassibility does not consist in mortifying the passionate part of the soul, but in removing it from evil to good, and directing its energies toward divine things... and the impassible man is one... who is marked by the virtues, as men of passion are marked by evil pleasures; who has tamed his irascible and concupiscent appetites (which constitute the passionate part of the soul), to the faculties of knowledge, judgment, and reason in the soul."[45]

The intimate insertion of the soul into body and its characterization as incarnate spirit or soul from the first moment of its existence does not mean that the soul cannot exist after death and before the resurrection of the body in virtue of the fact that it is no longer in the body. The soul carries with it its characterization as soul of the body and has the roots of the body deepened within itself during the course of life on earth. This, too, shows that the soul is a factor distinct from the body, yet without it ever being pure spirit only and hence receiving no qualities via the body with which it lived in a certain time and space.

This insertion of the free conscious spirit within nature can only be the work of a free Creator who transcends the world. Although the world understood as pure nature might indeed be the emanation from a force that was not itself free, the world created for the sake of man as an incarnate spirit – and hence as a free and conscious factor able to make use of the world in a contingent way and lead it toward the state wherein it becomes a totally transparent and elastic medium for the dialogue among human persons and between them and God as supreme Personal reality – such a world can only be the work of an omnipotent, spiritual, and free Creator.

God freely creates the world to make it spiritual and transparent for himself. He can do this, however, through the agency of man inasmuch as it is through man that God inserted free spirit within the world. Through the human spirit inserted within the world, the divine Spirit is himself at work to bring about the spiritualization of the world through his operation within the soul of man, and in a special way, through his incarnation as man. God makes himself known to man by preserving and guiding nature in a manner that is fitted and useful to human beings, as also by means of exceptional works of his omnipotence, which foster human awakening. In all this, however, God is addressing himself to man, and at the very least, man must be present if he is to have knowledge of this operation of God within the world. In every respect the world shows that it stands in relationship to man, even if only by the fact that human beings alone know the world.

As a unity between soul and body that has as its purpose to render the world transparent for God, human nature takes its origin within a special and creative act of God. From the very first moment of the existence of human nature, this special origin manifests itself in a wholly particular way, which is visible in the insertion of the spirit within nature as soul, that is, as the constitutive factor of human nature. The soul is brought into being by a special creative act of God so that it might make use of the world in a dialogue with God. This alone explains why the soul stirs and awakens within a world it did not itself create, but which it discovers to be fitted to itself and placed at its own disposal. The human soul has been created by God in a special fashion, inasmuch as it is endowed with characteristics akin to those of God: consciousness, cognitive reason, freedom. Through knowledge and actions, the human soul is called into a free dialogue with God, is called to use the world freely as a gift from God so as to make response through it to the love God has given every human being, and through the world, to extend this dialogue of love to his fellow human beings.

For this reason God is continually quickening the freedom of human beings in their attitude toward himself by remaining, as he does, in free relationship to them.

By bringing persons into existence, God calls more and more of them to continue the dialogue with himself and to raise the world up to that state where it serves as his own transparent medium. In bringing into existence new persons, however, God works in conjunction with the act of love of those human persons who commit themselves at the deepest level of their own responsibility to bring other human persons into existence and rear them to share in their own state of conscious freedom, handing on to them in turn both the dialogue that they themselves have undertaken with God and their fellow men and the whole of God's teachings too. Thus, every person who has come into existence represents a new and continued mode whereby human freedom is manifested in the dialogue with God and with his fellow human beings through nature, a nature that each person organizes and develops in a correspondingly characteristic fashion. Moreover, every human person also represents in himself that act whereby each is brought within the framework of the common responsibility all humans assume toward this task.

Within the fabric of nature every person takes his place as a new "eye" of spiritual transparence.[46] Through these "eyes" the incarnate God is at work deepening and enlarging this transparency until it reaches its fulfillment through resurrection. Human beings are not merely the repetition of a few uniform individuals. The liberty to which they are called and the contingent or always varied use they make of nature in continuous freedom demand that the irreducible originality of every human being be recognized. Only thus is the work of making nature into a spiritual reality achieved on a broad scale through the agency of more and more persons, each bringing his own different contribution, and by the agency of God who, in furthering this work, varies the assistance he gives to fit what is specific to each person and to suit the stage each has attained in this work.

MAN AS GOD'S SPECIAL ACT OF CREATION

According to Christian faith, man is brought into existence from the beginning as an incarnate spirit – that is, as a unity consisting of soul and body – by a special creative act of God. This is conditional upon the world existing as nature. Yet man, although he is linked to nature, is not nature's work.

Genesis does not say that God first formed the body and then breathed the breath of life into its nostrils, but only that God made man by taking dust from the earth and breathing into his nostrils the breath of life; thus man became a living soul.[47] There is no mention of any temporal succession at all in the creation of Adam. As a special being, man is created simultaneously in his wholeness. By remarking upon the double dimension of the act of Adam's creation, Genesis means only that man is constituted of two elements, body and soul, and that the body is from matter in general while the soul has a special kinship to God. St. Gregory of Nyssa asserted this kinship between God and man,[48] and St. Makarios of Egypt declared that the highest kinship exists between God and man.[49]

Genesis specifies, however, that the act of man's creation is also an act of a special kind precisely with regard to the body. On the one hand, man is a being distinct from nature, while on the other he is a being who is unitary and composite at the same time. In exactly the same manner, the act of man's creation as something simultaneously unitary and dual is distinct from that of the creation of nature. Indeed, the act of man's creation differs from the act of the creation of nature in that very dimension of it, which has reference to the body. God made the body by "taking dust from the ground." He did not simply command the earth to produce the body and give it power to this end. Thus God distinguished the body from the rest of nature in a fashion that goes beyond the way the bodies of various animals are distinct from nature. He made the body for the sake of the soul, which is akin to God in a special manner.

Nevertheless, as a real and "living" being, man comes into existence in the mode proper to his own essence through the act whereby God breathed into his nostrils. Because man is created not only from dust but also through God's act of breathing into the body fashioned from dust, it is evident that man has a special position not only vis-à-vis nature, from which his body is taken, but also in relation to God. Just as one takes part of the flour and puts the yeast into it and then mixes it with the rest of the flour, so man is formed from a part of nature into which the soul has been introduced so that afterwards the whole of nature, to which man continues to be linked, may be leavened, or, to change the image, so that man may be mediator of the Spirit of God to the whole of nature and priest of the entire cosmos. St. Gregory of Nazianzus said: "In my quality as one belonging to the earth, I am attached to life here, but being also a divine particle, I bear within me a yearning for the life to come."[50] Through this special relationship of the soul to God, man will ascend to the life to come, along with his body and along with the earth to which he is linked.

Due to the kinship the soul has with God, it is in this conscious and willed relationship of our being with his that the image of God in man resides. Man exists in the image of God because, having a soul akin to God, he tends toward God and finds himself in living relationship with him. Moreover, it is precisely through this relationship that man keeps his kinship with God undiminished. Even a biological image preserves affinity with its pattern only if continual power comes to it from that pattern or if continuous communion exists between itself and the pattern. The same phenomenon can also be observed among human beings. A frequent and convergent relationship will make two or more people come to resemble one another. If, however, no affinity between a biological image and its pattern, or between two or more human beings existed, there would be no question either of any relationship manifesting or expressing the one as image of the other. Thus, man remains as the undiminished image of God only if, on the basis of some kind of kinship, a living relationship between himself and God is preserved, a continuous communion wherein both God and man are active.

Our being appears and therefore continues as an image of God because of the living relationship, and this relationship in turn is possible because from the beginning God has made man akin to himself and hence capable of a relationship with himself. In other words, God placed man from the beginning in conscious and free relationship with himself through the very act of breathing into him the living soul (cf. 1 Cor 15:45 where man is called a "living soul" in order to stress his unity), for the fathers say that through this inbreathing God implanted in man not only the intellective soul, which is akin to God, but his grace also, as manifesting his relationship with man. And it is grace that calls forth man's response to the act of God that establishes the relationship. St. Gregory Palamas said: "Then the eyes of angels looked upon the human soul, united with the senses and with the flesh and they saw another god, not merely fashioned on earth as mind and flesh through the divine goodness, but given form through the abundance of that same goodness and according to God's grace (κατά θεοῦ χάριν μεμορφομένον) so as to be the same body and mind and spirit, and to have the soul exist according to the divine image and likeness as perfectly single in mind, reason, and spirit."[51] Our being has its kinship with God through the spirit it has received, but it receives the spirit because it is fitted for this and can receive it and because it is capable of a conscious relationship with God.

The image comes to be seen here through participation in the Holy Trinity, and precisely through this participation, as something that belongs to the mental and rational soul of man, while grace comes to be seen as the uncreated energy of the Holy Spirit, as active communion with God. Furthermore, St. Gregory Palamas regarded the living soul, which was breathed into humans, as eternally alive, immortal, and endowed with divine grace. "What did he breathe into him? The breath of life... 'The first man... became a living spirit.' But what does 'living' mean? Eternally living, immortal, which is the same as saying rational... it is also endowed with divine grace. For such is the truly living soul. And this is identical with 'in the image' and, if you like, 'in the likeness' too."[52] The tendency exists within reason for it to go on knowing for all eternity, while within the word the tendency exists for it to go on speaking for all eternity.

This identification of the rational with immortality will be better understood, however, if on the one hand we take into account that a human existence pointed toward death is irrational or meaningless, and on the other hand, if we regard the rational as that which issues in speech. Man speaks because he is addressed by God, because through speech he is placed in relationship with God. And because man speaks or, better, because man responds, he will never cease responding, for God will never cease to tell man what God is or cease to reveal his love. Nor will man ever cease to understand or cease to wish to understand still more, or cease to express his joy, gratitude, and praise for what God shows him.

This inbreathing of God implants more than just biological life within man (for animals also have this and they do not receive the divine inbreathing); it bestows the life of understanding and also of communion with God, that is to say, spiritual life. To the extent that the understanding is developed, so, too, is communion developed, and vice versa. Herein lies the image in its wholeness. Through God's inbreathing, the free and intellective soul is placed once and for all within man, while God, through his breathing, enters simultaneously also into communion with the soul implanted in man. Once breathed into humans, the communion of humans with God springs forth from the soul and from that communion begun by God – which is identical with His grace – the communion of man with God. That is why in the East, grace has always been closely linked with the nature of man and especially with his soul. Even after the Fall, man was left with soul, with at least some sort of divine grace. Thus, he continues to aspire in some way after God and so remains in some relationship with him.

Into the biological organism God breathes the spiritual support of the soul, and to the soul he addresses his call, while at the same time providing it with the capacity to respond. By breathing into man, God begins to speak with him; he gives man the assurance that it is God who is speaking with him and that he must reply. Along with the soul God also gives man the consciousness that it is God who is speaking with him and that he must respond. Through the breathing of God a "Thou" who belongs to God and is the "image of God" appears in man for this "Thou" is able to say "I" in its own right and can also address God as "Thou." Out of nothingness God provides himself with a partner for dialogue, a partner who exists in a biological organism. The spiritual breathing of God produces an ontological spiritual breathing of man, namely, the spiritual soul, which has its roots within the biological organism and is in conscious dialogue with God and with its fellow human beings.

This dialogue, moreover, is meant to last unceasingly. Because of sin the clarity of this communion has been darkened, but inasmuch as the rational soul still remains within man, a certain kind of relationship with God also remains, even when God is known no longer as Person, but only as the impersonal truth and goodness that flows out from behind his shrouded face.

In its quality as image of God, our being remains permanently a participant in what is divine and in that light, which is divine, even though our perception is clouded. According to St. Gregory of Nyssa, who here followed St. Paul the Apostle (Acts 17:29), we are "of God's kin," and St. Gregory of Nazianzus declared that we are a "particle" of God.[53] But this participation is not just a fact that is given; it demands development. St. Maximus explained this in the sense that we have the divine Reason or the Word of God as principle and cause, and that it is through our activity that we are to draw nearer to God.[54] St. Gregory of Nyssa linked participation with kinship, saying: "There is something which relates man to God. For in order to enjoy the divine goods, man must possess something in his being akin to the One in Whom he participates."[55] Kallistos Kataphygiotes, moreover, connects the dialogue in love both to participation and to kinship when he says that both God and humans love and wish to be loved.[56] To the notion of God as lover, the following sentiment corresponds on the human side: "I love, therefore I am a man" (Baratynsky).

Through the very act of his creation, the human being was honored with this quality of being the image of God, for it was through this quality that his kinship and relationship with God were implanted within him. Such a quality is preserved and developed, however, by means of that continuous relationship with God of which the human being is capable and which is also required of him because of the nature of his soul. As Vyschevslavzev puts it, the image is both "gift" and "task" (*Gabe und Aufgabe*)."[57]

In his quality as image, the whole human being reaches out toward his pattern, that is, toward God. Vyschevslavzev observes that "man cannot be conceived of at all apart from the relation with God, for reference to the absolute is essential to him. The human person is rooted and anchored in the absolute."[58] The alternation this theologian makes between God and the absolute is a necessary one. The human person tends toward God inasmuch as God is absolute, and he tends toward the absolute inasmuch as the absolute is the personal God.

An impersonal absolute is not genuinely absolute, while a personal God who was not absolute could neither be a fully and eternally satisfying source for humanity, nor could he assure humanity's eternal and plenary existence within a perfect communion. And this, too, is what the human being seeks, his own desire, which he can neither neglect nor stifle. Man cannot be content to remain locked up within his relationships to finite realities. He needs to relate to infinite reality, which simultaneously includes a continual newness. This newness is not to be identified only with man's own ever-new interest; it must be identified also with the continually new interest, which that inexhaustible Personal reality takes in him. In this infinite love alone can man find rest. "*Inquietum est cor nostrum donec requiescat in Te*," said the Blessed Augustine.[59]

Our reason and our heart call out for communion with the Personal reality capable of an infinite relationship so that the meaning of existence may be fully explained and our being filled with an endless joy that knows no defect. This is what the mind perceives as the highest meaning of existence. Hence, the fathers see the image of God manifesting itself in all the functions and movements of the soul, or, rather, of the human being. All of these participate in the image of God, in the capacity for relationship with God and in the yearning after communion with him. Thus as Lossky wrote:

> Sometimes the image of God is sought in the sovereign dignity of man, in His lordship over the terrestrial world; sometimes it is sought in His spiritual nature, in the soul, or in the principal, ruling (ἡγεμενικον) part of His being, in the mind (νοῦς) in the higher faculties such as the intellect, the reason (λόγος) or in the freedom proper to man, the faculty of inner determination (αὐτεξουσία), by virtue of which man is the true author of his actions. Sometimes the image of God is identified with a particular quality of the soul, its simplicity or its immortality, or else it is described as the ability of knowing God, of living in communion with Him, with the possibility of sharing the divine being or with the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the soul. Sometimes, as in the Spiritual Homilies attributed to St. Macarius of Egypt, the image of God is presented in two ways. First it is the formal condition of liberty, free will, the faculty of choice which cannot be destroyed by sin; secondly, it is the "heavenly image," the positive content of the image, which is that communion with God, whereby before the fall man was clothed with the Word and the Holy Spirit.[60]

Finally, as in St. Irenaeus, St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Gregory Palamas, not only the soul, but also the body of man shares in the character of the image, being created in the image of God. "The word Man," wrote St. Gregory Palarnas, "is not applied to either soul or body separately, but to both together, since together they have been created in the image of God."[61] That is to say, no single component of the human being possesses the quality of being image by itself alone, but only in so far as the whole person manifests himself through each part and action.

Paul Evdokimov declares in turn:

> Going over the immense field of patristic thought, infinitely rich and full of nuance, one gets the impression that it avoids all systematization in order to preserve the whole of its amazing suppleness. It permits us, however, to draw some fundamental conclusions. Above all, we must eliminate any substantialist conception of the image. This latter is not placed in us as a part of our being, but the *totality* of the human being is created, sculptured, "in the image." The first expression of the image consists in the hierarchical structure of "man," with the spiritual life at the center. It is this centrality, this primacy of the life of the spirit which conditions the fundamental aspiration towards the spiritual, towards the absolute. It is the dynamic *élan* of our whole being toward its divine Archetype (Origen); it is the irresistible aspiration of our spirit toward God (St. Basil); it is the human *erós* stretched out toward the divine *Erós* (St. Gregory Palamas). In short, it is the inextinguishable thirst, the density of desire for God, as St. Gregory of Nazianzus expressed it so wonderfully: "It is for you that I live, speak and sing." To sum up, each faculty of the human spirit reflects the image, but this latter is essentially the human whole as centered on the spiritual, and its own proper characteristic is to go beyond itself in order to throw itself into the infinite ocean of the divine and to find there the assuaging of its nostalgia. It is the tension of the icon towards its original; of the image towards its *arché*.[62]

Infinite increase in communion with God is to increase infinitely in knowing him and participating in him. If during life on earth this increase is always moving from one stage to another, because on each level the infinity of God is sensed but not tasted, in the life to come, one who has believed will be plunged so completely into the divine infinity along with his knowledge and experience that he will no longer pass from one level to another but will rest eternally within this rest which will crown the movement that marks the human being's earthly life.[63]

We must continually specify that the ocean of this infinity does not have an impersonal character. This is why St. Maximus affirmed that the personal God in whose bosom the creature will rest transcends all infinity. Thus, the human being's eternal "rest" will preserve forever its character as communion. More infinity and more joy are to be found in communion with the personal God than in any act of being submerged in an ocean of infinity, for this communion is rest in the love of the infinite Person. Submersion in an impersonal ocean would mean that the human person was dissolved within it: "For infinity is around God, but it is not God, who remains incomparably above even this."[64] Infinity radiates from God, but God transcends it. Infinity is in him, but God is its subject, and he bestows incomparably more joy than an impersonal infinity could.

This greatest possible union with God wherein the fullness of God is stamped upon the human being, yet without the human being thereby being dissolved into God – this is the human being's deification. It is in view of this deification that the image of God is bestowed upon the human being and serves to draw him toward his absolute pattern. And it is in deification that the image finds its own fulfillment as the highest possible likeness with God. The tension that draws the human being toward deification is implied as a divine commandment. The human being is "a creature" who has "received the order to become God," wrote St. Gregory of Nazianzus (following in this case St. Basil the Great).[65] "The image predestines the human being toward *theosis*" and implies his thirst for infinity as a two-sided relationship.[66]

Likeness, however, is not just the final state of deification; it is also the entire path along which the image develops through the agency of the human will stimulated and assisted by the grace of God. That is why the fathers, from the beginning right down to St. Gregory Palamas, all stressed the fact that "image" develops into "likeness," particularly by means of the virtues which are in a special way the work of the will helped by grace.

St. John of Damascus wrote: "'In the image' points therefore to the mind and freedom, and 'in the likeness' to the greatest possible similitude in virtue."[67]

This distinction between image and likeness helps us understand the declaration of some of the fathers that the image was preserved in man even when he left the path leading toward likeness. Although, after the Fall, the human person still retained a certain yearning after the good and at least some capacity for doing the good (just as he retained an inner impulse toward truth and at least some knowledge of certain fragments of truth), nevertheless, the fathers do not say that because of this the human person has remained on the path that leads to likeness. Indeed, to a certain extent even the image itself has been weakened because it has not been activated fully in the work of growing into the likeness. An image in its fullness is an image that passes into act in the very movement of growing toward likeness. An image that is not activated is in some fashion an image that has been weakened, although it is never totally lost. Hence Christ is said to have reestablished the image or to have found the image that was lost, but it is not said that he created it again.

The image as inner impulse, as tendency toward God, has become mingled with a contrary tendency. More accurately, the image as aspiration toward the absolute has been preserved, but the absolute has hidden its personal face from man, and consequently, the image in man has lost its luminous quality and its clarity. The features of it have remained but have been, in part, distorted, just as in a caricature the facial elements remain but are distorted. Similarly, the structures of human nature remain essentially the same but are activated in a way that is contrary to nature.

After affirming that it is not the image but only the likeness that we have lost, St. Gregory Palamas continued: "...if it [the soul] does not reject attachment and submission to inferior things ... it inflicts shameful dishonor upon the image of God ... For he who loves wrongdoing hates his own soul, and, in tearing apart and disabling the image of God (To κατ', εἰκόνα ... διασπῶν τε καὶ ἀκρειῶν), he experiences suffering similar to that of madmen who pitilessly cut their own flesh to pieces..."[68]

Only when taken in this sense do we think that what Evdokimov has said can be accepted, namely, that an image without likeness is an image reduced to passivity: "The patristic tradition is very explicit and very firm: after the fall, the image in its own reality remains without change, but in its action it is reduced to ontological silence."[69] We believe that the passivity to which the image is reduced lies in the fact that it cannot of itself bring its potencies into act along the proper path. And indeed, even when the image becomes active, it operates in changed fashion, passing fretfully from one finite object to another, seeking but not finding satisfaction and rest. All this suggests, however, that it is possible to bring the image and its inherent potential operations – all of which have remained in existence – to a point where they can be activated again in a proper way.

Anyone who responds negatively to the appeal of another and does not see what is limitless in the other still preserves the capacity and the necessity of making a response; it is only that he is responding in a way that is contrary to his own nature. For nature remains within the heart of the dialogue when it is a response given to the other seen in his limitlessness. Hence, it is easy for the human being to be brought back to a positive response. Even the selfish man remains preoccupied with other people, for he defines his own self-preoccupations in opposition to others, and his passion is to affirm himself in reference to other people. Thus he, too, is preoccupied with others both in referring them to himself and in considering himself as the only absolute. In this way he loses sight of the true absolute or comes to consider it as something impersonal and hence apt for annexation to himself. In essence, however, the egoist cannot escape from ontological, spiritual relationship with others, and consequently it is easy to lead him back toward positive preoccupation with them.

Negative preoccupation with others, or negative response to the needs of others does not remain, therefore, impermeable to the influence of particular impulses that lead to positive preoccupation or positive response. And the absolute that is the object of occasional thought or aspiration does not forever remain devoid of a personal face or of that character that constitutes for the human being the true absolute, one that lays a foundation for his tendency to respond to his fellow human beings with positive enthusiasm. Evdokimov himself, moreover, interprets in this sense his own assertion that the image has remained intact but passive, adding that "the image was made inefficacious in this way through the destruction of all capacity for 'likeness.' "[70] This capacity belongs to the "image" and once destroyed, the image itself is weakened. In his note he adds, citing St. John of Damascus: "This is why it is through losing the likeness that man has falsified the image."[71]

St. Gregory Palamas held that the image has remained, but we have lost its stability, which is identical with the likeness.[72] An image is complete, however, when it manifests itself fixedly as image or becomes active in the likeness. An image without likeness reveals itself as image in an altered, not in an integral way. The paradox lies in the fact that the image is image and yet can neither manifest itself as image in a fixed manner nor reveal itself clearly. Instead, a certain ambiguity or duplicity has been introduced within it.

We have observed already that the greatest possible union with God, toward whom we ascend through virtue, cannot mean submersion within the ocean of an impersonal infinity.

That would no longer signify a human being deified through grace while distinct from God by nature, but rather a single and undifferentiated divinity.

In such a case the state of final deification would no longer be a state of the highest possible communion. Nor would the path that leads to deification represent an effort made in that direction of communion, which sharpens the human person's sense of being a responsible partner in such communion and strengthens his freedom in the face of depersonalizing and egocentric passions. Were it the case that a human being sinks into the monotonous and lifeless ocean of impersonal infinity, his path would have to prepare him for this final extinction of personal consciousness, whether by way of sinking gradually within a desolate "I" devoid of all relation (in a Platonic/Originist sense reminiscent of nirvana), or, contrariwise, by way of letting himself be carried off on the dizzying whirlwind of the passions. For here, too, a human being becomes oblivious of the "I," which has departed from communion, or else he comes to think of himself as borne along on the tumultuous waves of a sea of common sensations, yet outside all personal communion.

True communion develops by way of an attention that is directed toward other human beings and toward the world understood as the work of God. This attention is joined both to the control of the passions in their quality as unending impulses toward the finite and to the practice of the virtues that reach their highest point in the love for persons and for God as Personal reality, and hence as the true absolute. Such communion opens the path to contemplation – at once sobering and dizzying – of the depths that lie within our fellow men and of the meanings inherent in this world. Such contemplation, moreover, is potentially infinite because both our fellow human beings and the inherent meanings of the world (through their reasons/inner principles that are gradually and ceaselessly being revealed) are rooted in the infinity and boundless love of God who is Trinity. In order to bring about this ascent of the human being, the vigilance of reason and the *élan* of loving self-transcendence unite in a unique way, for reason distinguishes not merely the infinite from the finite but also the luminous way leading toward infinity from the darkened path teeming with the enthralling passions.

According to Evdokimov, we see in our image "the reproduction of the unutterable Trinitarian mystery, right down to that level of profondity where man is an enigma to himself... For it is easier to know heaven than to know oneself."[73]

Vyscheslavzev spoke of an anthropological apophaticism, which is an image of the divine apophaticism. As in the case of God, we know only his uncreated energies, so in humans we know only the human energies. "There is a negative theology that points to the deepest mystery of the divinity; accordingly there must also be a negative anthropology that refers to the mystery of man."[74]

We live this mystery as person, as subject. And the mystery of our own person, as the source of unsuspected states, feelings, and thoughts, we live in a way that is made vital and actual in relationship to and together with the mystery of the persons of our fellow human beings. The mystery, the divine image of our person and of the person of others, discloses itself and becomes actual in communion. It is in communion with our fellow human beings, however, that the mystery of the interpersonal divine presence is most clearly revealed. For it is only from the love between the divine Persons that the force of our own interpersonal love radiates. Interpersonal communion is an image of the Trinitarian communion and a participation in it. Hence, the divine image in the human person is an image of the Trinity and reveals itself in human communion. St. Gregory of Nyssa observed that "the image is not in a part of our nature, nor is the grace in any one of the things found in that nature, but this power extends equally to all the race."[75]

Commenting on this Jean Daniélou wrote: "This new aspect of the εἰκών will also determine an entire aspect of spiritual theology. If the image is only in community, the spiritual life will have to be lived in community on the one hand, and on the other will have to be oriented toward a more perfect realization of community ... In the end, it is oriented... by that perfect realization of the image through the union of all things in Christ, which is the fundamental perspective of Gregory's thought: 'When perfect love will have cast out fear, then all that will be saved will find itself forming a unity, and all will be, the one in the other, within the Perfect Dove.'"[76]

Cyprian Kern, commenting on the texts of St. Gregory Palamas, adds: "This likeness of God is not simply the image of one of the persons of the Holy Trinity, but of the whole life-creating Trinity. The human person as image thus reflects in himself, in his spiritual structure and life, the inner Trinitarian life of the divinity. This was the teaching of St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Cyril of Alexandria, the Blessed Theodoret, Basil of Seleucia, Anastasius of Sinai, St. John of Damascus, and St. Photius the Patriarch."[77]

The fact that Genesis speaks of the image in connection with the creation of the human person as a couple may have significance for the communitarian character of the image and for its development in common. "So God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them" (Gen 1:27). Moreover, for the connection between the communitarian character of the image and the Holy Trinity there may also be significance in the fact that immediately before this, Genesis represents God as speaking in the plural when the decision is made to create man in the divine image: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'" (Gen 1:26).

Certainly, before sin the love between man and woman was not burdened by that violent passion that shares in the elemental quality of an impersonal and unspiritual nature. All human structures have been degraded by sin. With respect to the words, "God created man in His own image; male and female He created them," Lossky wrote: "Thus the mystery of the singular and plural in man reflects the mystery of the singular and plural in God: in the same way that the personal principle in God demands that the one nature express itself in the diversity of persons, likewise in man, created in the image of God. Human nature cannot be the possession of a monad. It demands not solitude but communion, the wholesome diversity of love." Furthermore:

> But this paradisiacal "eros" would have been ... different from our fallen and devouring sexuality ... the Fall has changed the very meaning of the words. Sexuality, this "multiplying" that God orders and blesses, appears in our universe as irremediably linked to separation and death. This is because the condition of man has known, at least in his biological reality, a catastrophic mutation. But human love would not be pregnant with such a paradisiacal nostalgia if there did not remain painfully within it the memory of a first condition where the other and the world were known from the inside, where, accordingly, death did not exist.[78]

In the distinction between man and woman, humanity possesses as positive fact quite an important element of complementarity and thus also the opportunity for a heightened spiritual enrichment. It is this that surpasses the violence of sexual pleasure wherein the material sensibility has acquired so overwhelming a force, and it is this that endures beyond it. The love between man and woman surpasses the dimensions of sexual pleasure; we may even say that such love can grow more profound and is more lasting where no preoccupation with this pleasure exists. Human beings needed to multiply, however, in order to foster that unending richness that the multitudes of persons (unique in their originality) occasions for the benefit of every human being and for that of humanity in general. Moreover, the relationship with each person always poses for man new problems to be resolved; relationship with his fellow men creates social situations that are always new, just as it creates new problems in his dealings with nature itself. There can be no enrichment, no reaching of fulfillment for human nature, unless that nature subsists in varied hypostases. With respect to both knowledge and responsibility, human nature achieves endless progress within the infinitely varied relations that obtain among the many hypostases of the one nature.

If it is the case that we are drawn toward eternal communion with God and spiritual growth in him only by the mysterious way the image within us participates in its model and by the active functionings of the divine energies, then it is also true that what attracts us toward that eternal communion with our fellow human beings in God – apart from which no increase at all in communion with God is possible for us – is a twofold reality: not simply common participation in the life-in-communion of the Trinity and in the wealth of the energies that same life imparts to us, but also that common nature we share, namely, the fact that this same nature subsists in many hypostases.

Reflecting upon the distinction between person and nature, Lossky allows for the existence of at least a partial opposition between them, attributing to person (in contradistinction to nature) the apophatic intimacy of the "image," which is determinative for the individual. But in affirming this opposition he understands nature in the lesser sense of the word, that is, as the nature that is parceled out among individuals. One who succeeds in becoming the hypostasis of human nature as a whole, however, is no longer an individual but a person. Thus Lossky wrote in part that " 'individual' expresses some mixture of the person with elements belonging to common nature, while 'person' denotes what is distinguished from nature."[79] And he continued: "The man ruled by his nature and acting according to his natural properties, according to his character, is the least personal."[80] And again: "We experience some difficulty in connection with the christological dogma, which considers will as a function of nature. It is easier for us to imagine the person as something that determines itself and forces us to recognize it by virtue of its will. However, the idea of the person implies the idea of freedom in relation to nature. The person is free from, and undetermined by, its nature. The human hypostasis can only reveal itself by renouncing its own will because the latter determines us and subjects us to natural necessity. Everything individual, everything self-determining, in which the person is confused with nature and thereby loses its true freedom, must be destroyed."[81]

After this Lossky continued in the most authentic Orthodox spirit:

> What corresponds in us to God's image is not a part of our nature, but the person including nature in itself... In the case of the person (and not the individual), a hypostasis does not divide the nature, generating several separate natures. The Holy Trinity is not three gods, but only one... Man shows himself in a double aspect: as individual nature, he becomes a part of the whole, one of the component elements of the world; but as person, he is by no means a part, he contains everything in himself. The nature is the content of the person; the person is the image of this nature's existence. A person, affirming himself as an individual and confining himself to the limits of his separate nature, cannot flower fully and grows impoverished. Only by renouncing his own content, freely giving it up, ceasing to exist for himself alone, does a person fully express himself in the single nature of all. Renouncing his separate good, he endlessly expands and is enriched by everything that belongs to all. A person becomes the perfect image of God by discovering His likeness, which is the perfection of the nature common to all men. The distinction between persons and nature reproduces in humanity the order of divine life expressed by the dogma of the Trinity."[82]

While agreeing entirely with the positive sense Lossky ascribed to human nature in the second part of his exposition, in our view the negative sense he ascribed to nature in the first part refers properly not to human nature as such, but to a distorted condition of that nature. St. Irenaeus said that fallen man is no longer the true man,[83] that is, he no longer possesses even the true nature. A nature that is parceled out into individuals no longer preserves the complete and authentic marks of nature because it no longer manifests harmony within itself. The person has become an individual not because he has blended in with the elements of human nature but due to the fact that he does not comprise the whole of nature, because he wishes to keep the nature that he himself represents separated off from human nature as a whole.

This idea of nature as an element that has no freedom is borrowed either from nature apprehended externally in a physical and biological sense or from fallen nature, for in the latter case the spiritual factor that also belongs to human nature no longer asserts itself with the whole of its power, and this leads to the weakening of man as person. The profundity of the person is ultimately the profundity of the nature that is preserved intact.

Lossky showed very well how communion between human persons does not mean the individual's propensity to take over for himself the nature that belongs to all, for this would merely serve to make other individuals hold fast to their own small fragments of nature. Instead, communion means the will of nature to belong to everyone in common, that will which is manifested through the agency of persons in whom it exists concretely.

In fact, the fathers in general make no distinction of content between person and nature. Person is only nature in its real existence. In the normal state, moreover, all persons in common comprise the whole of human nature, bestowing and receiving it reciprocally among themselves just as the Holy Trinity does. That is precisely why human beings can only bring about this state, which is simultaneously an ontological state and a state of love, out of the power that comes from the communion of nature and of supreme love present in the Holy Trinity, that is, in the culmination of communion (if not by nature, then certainly by grace or by uncreated energy and love) with the Holy Trinity.

Nevertheless, we should also note that St. Athanasius emphasized a further meaning of created nature – which includes human nature too – namely, that nature comes forth from nothingness, from non-being, and that when it falls into sin it tends once more toward nothingness.[84] Only the connection with God preserves nature and advances it in life. It could be said, therefore, that human nature has God as basis for its own subsistence, or again, that what makes man capable of maintaining himself as a person at once immortal and profound is the divine Spirit that strengthens his own spirit. In this sense Lossky would be right to say that descent toward the state of incommunicative nature makes the human being descend from the level where he is person and image of God, whereas when man brings about perfect communion (in so far as participation in communion with God is implied in this), he is both preserved and advanced in his quality as person and image.

It is in a multiplicity of hypostases that nature truly subsists, and it is in the fullness of relation among these hypostases that nature is endlessly enriched, according to the pattern and dependent on the power of the Trinitarian communion. The hypostasis cannot be understood either emptied of nature or separated from relationship. The hypostases are the nature in the concrete existence and form of their inter-relationships; they are the nature in the dynamic of those internal relationships that come to be within nature's manifold hypostatic form. The hypostasis is an "I" related to a "Thou" of the same nature. Only thus does it experience unending relationships of knowing and responding, and only thus does nature exist in a way that is real. Moreover, in hypostatic form human nature also realizes the unending relationship to an absolute "Thou." Because it is human nature really subsistent, the human hypostasis, the human person, can have no genuine development unless it has relationship and responsibility to the personal absolute.

Up to this point we have been looking at the Holy Trinity as the model for the divine image of the human person. It must not be forgotten, however, that the human person is also regarded as the image of the divine Logos, who in his turn, because he is the image of the Father, has also put on his human image in the fullness of time (Phil 2:6-7; Heb 1:3). Accordingly, the human person is the "image" of the Word, and as such he is "in the image" of the Father. Inasmuch as man is the image of the Word and in the image of the Father, he is placed in relationship to the Trinitarian communion and called to bring about on the human plane a life of communion similar to that of the Trinity and arising from its power. Through the Incarnation, Christ raised up the divine image in man to its fully actual state, that is, to the full communion that it is able to have with God and with the human beings.

As image of the Word, the human being has the character of a subject vis-à-vis created things, that is, he shares in this character together with his fellow human beings and bears the responsibility of perceiving the divine "reasons" through the medium of created things and of perceiving the Logos himself as their supreme subject. He has the further responsibility of developing communion along with his fellow human beings as those who together relate to created things as their common subjects, after the image of the divine Logos.

Making the image actual, therefore, does not consist only in bringing about full communion with God and with one another for those who believe in Christ, who is their divine and human model; it also includes the introduction of nature as a whole within the communion of transfigured humankind. The divine Spirit, who is bestowed from Christ in his fullness upon those who believe in him and strengthens the spirit within each of them, will cause not only their bodies but the whole of cosmic nature as well to display their qualities of elasticity and transparency to the full. Against the assertions of Platonism and Origenism, which separated the human spirit from the body, the prison of the world, and from history, so that the spirit might return to the *pleroma* from which it fell, St. Maximus the Confessor insisted at length on this other perspective. Men cause their divine image or authentic humanity to become actual by advancing toward knowledge of God and growing in their likeness to him. This comes about in a number of ways: through progress in their grasp of the reasons/inner principles of created things; through penetration via these reasons to their pre-existent reasons in God and so to God himself; and through the living of a life that conforms to the symphony of these reasons. Man is called to grow by exercising spiritual rule over the world, by transfiguring it, by exercising his capacity to see the world and make of it a medium transparent of the spiritual order that radiates from the person of the Word.

Science also serves to increase the human being's spiritual growth, for it can uncover the apophatic meaning of the world, hidden in God, on an ever higher level, just as it can also glean that meaning from the experiences of history. These latter, if they are good experiences, extend human communion. If they are bad, they either reveal the need for divine help in order for our existence to reach its true perfection, or they turn us back toward the good. In general, everything serves to help us discover the infinite complexity of human possibilities in inter-relationships among human beings and in the relations they have with nature. Nevertheless, the genuine profit man must gain from history is the strengthening of the human spirit so that the contingency of the body and of nature in relation to the human spirit may be actualized in a more and more emphatic way for the sake of disclosing more and more of the true potentialities of nature.

In a way, the common human nature has an extension of itself in cosmic nature, for this, too, is something common. Hence, if the development of human communion means that the character of human nature is made actual in the common nature, it must also mean that the cosmic nature is actualized as a common reality.

THE PRIMORDIAL STATE

The divine image consists in the ontological structure of the human being that has been made to tend toward communion with the supreme Communion (namely, that of the divine persons who are the source of every communion) and with human persons, while the likeness lies in the activating of this same structure. Consequently, the primordial state of humanity could not have been a state characterized by the development of the image into those virtues through which this communion is manifested because that would have required the passage of time. Nor, on the other hand, could the primordial state have been characterized by the absence of the image as ontological structure tending toward this communion, for a specific human structure of that kind is not something that is acquired over time. From the outset, the human person was a human person.

Hence, the human person was pure, free from evil propensities and endowed with a tendency toward the good of communion with God and his fellow human beings; yet he was not confirmed in this purity and in this good. The human person was conscious and free, and both in his conscience and in his freedom, he tended toward the good. He had not achieved, however, an advanced consciousness of the good and the true, nor an assured freedom in the face of possible enslavement by certain passions. The human person was not sinful, but neither was he adorned with acquired virtues and consolidated and purified thoughts. His innocence was that of one who had not tasted sin; it was not the innocence acquired by one who has repelled temptations. The human person was a being whose spirit had not been wounded or weakened by the passions, but neither had it yet been strengthened through exercise in the tasks of bringing both body and world into subjection and of causing the contingent elasticity of the world to become actual. The human body was no slave to the automatic laws of sin, yet neither did it have the force (developed through exercise) to remain immune against such a condition. The world did not weigh down the human body and spirit with the entangling chains of its own processes, but neither had it been brought under the sway of the spirit that asserts its own power over the world.

For the human being, the world had the same transparency it has for an innocent child – although the child, when it begins to do evil, can soon collide with the world's opacity – but it did not have the same transparency it has for the saint who has truly vanquished its opacity. The good sense that reason possesses in its understanding of created things and in its choice of actions had a clarity it could not preserve when the human person came to be pulled in all directions by every manner of knowledge and opinion. However, this good sense was not something already tried and made unshakably steadfast by man having gained critical experience in holding fast to good and rejecting evil.

When the mirror of the human soul was untroubled, the personal God, creator and providential guide, revealed himself there with an uncontestable degree of evidence, and all the good intentions of man coincided with those suggested from within by God. The natural and the supernatural did not form two distinct levels of life and reality, but combined in a singular order of life that was simultaneously lucid and good. It is particularly to this state that did not know sin that

St. Maximus' assertion regarding the absence of distinction between the natural law and the supernatural law applies.[85] In the condition that was his from the beginning, man saw in all things, just as the saint does, gifts continually being offered by God and words continually being addressed to him through the various circumstances brought about by God. Nature itself was a diaphanous medium of the present activity and speech of God. Only when sin blunted the acuteness of man's pure sensitivity to God, who works and speaks through created things, did the necessity arise for a revelation that differed from the activity that God was still carrying on at every moment through the medium of creation, but no longer perceived by man. Before that time God walked continuously through the transparent "garden" of the world.

Had this original innocence been consolidated through acts of persevering in it, the spiritual force in the human person would have become so strong that the law of corruption would not have been able to impose its rule either in the world or in the body. The potency for immortality, which the human person possessed within himself through his spirit, which was created in the image of God, would have passed into act.

The temptations and passions found in humanity are not to be thought of as roots ready to shoot up with the commanding force of necessity. It was in the sensibility of the body that the possibility for these was given, but the body could have been kept pure had man given his spirit the predominant role, just as the possibility for defilement existed if man let this sensibility increase in a way that was predominantly carnal. Although man enjoyed a freedom he no longer had after he fell into sin, the freedom of the first man was not so confirmed in the good, however, as to hold completely firm in the face of temptations from a sensibility that was predominantly of the flesh. The first man was able to change his state of purity more easily than someone who is consolidated in his hold on the good by reason of long perseverance, yet the attraction to such a change in the case of the first man did not come from the violence of certain pleasures already tasted or of certain passions that had penetrated deeply within through the habituation of nature.

It is with these rather general strokes that the fathers depict the primordial state. St. John of Damascus wrote that God created man "sinless and endowed with freedom of will. By being sinless I do not mean being incapable of sinning, for only the Divinity is incapable of sinning, but having the tendency to sin not in his nature (σούχ ὥς ἐν τῂ φύσει τὸ ἅμαρτάνειν ἔχοντα) but, rather, in his power of choice – that is to say, having the power to persevere and progress in good with the help of divine grace, as well as having the power to turn from virtue and fall into vice, God permitting this because of the freedom of the will. For that which is done by force is not an act of virtue."[86]

God did not create man as a cog to function automatically within the machinery of a nature that was inflexible in its processes. Rather, he created him as a free subject, capable of making the processes of nature supple so that through them man might do the good freely and thereby display his conformity with the goodness of God's own will and so advance in his likeness to God. For man to have been placed mechanically within the framework of the order of a nature that was itself mechanical would have made the creation of the world, and with it the creation of man, too, devoid of all meaning. But the creation of a nature that is able to draw man within such an automatism and, in the passions, is able to take on for man's sensibility (which has its echo in the realm of the spirit) the proportions of something absolute, imposes on him the mission of struggling to maintain and confirm his freedom. And this, so that through the agency of that same liberty, both nature and the human body may be freed from the automatism of being incorporated within the framework of nature along with the interior reverberations of the human passions. Man cannot become wholly mechanical like nature, but he does become sinful when he falls under the sway of nature, just as he becomes virtuous and spiritually strengthened when he asserts his own mastery over it. That is why the commandment was given him to have dominion over nature. Had man followed this commandment, he would have affirmed his freedom and thereby reinforced the spirit, for the commandment did not aim at bringing man into bondage, but at strengthening him in freedom and in communion with God. It demanded of him that he remain man and grow in strength precisely as man, as a being who transcends nature.

It is only because he is above the automatism of nature that man can also genuinely love God, or be genuinely virtuous. Virtue or absence of sin that comes about through nature and not through freedom of will represents no spiritual power. St. Basil answered the question of why sinlessness is not a constitutive part of our makeup in this way: "Because you also have well disposed servants not when you tie them up, but when you see them willingly fulfill their duties. Likewise, God does not love what we do by force, but what we do by virtue. And virtue is performed by free choice, not by force. And the free choice depends on us. And what depends on us is freedom."[87]

When man did not obey the command to have dominion over nature, he renounced freedom. It was, however, by means of freedom itself that he renounced freedom, and this was done in a way that leaves man the possibility – whenever he wishes – of going back on this renunciation, at least in part, that is, of desiring to go back on it. Had man not also had the freedom to make such a renunciation of his own accord, neither would he have been asked to affirm it by his subduing of nature. The basis for the entire greatness of the human person's divine image lies in his freedom. Yet in that freedom, three further possibilities were implied: the possibility of falling; the possibility of the human being asserting his freedom by making a simultaneous renunciation of it to a certain degree; and, finally, the possibility of giving continual assent – by means of his freedom – to this renunciation of freedom.

> To execute this order [to become God, as St. Basil said], one must be able to refuse it. God becomes powerless before human freedom; He cannot violate it since it flows from His own omnipotence. Certainly man was created by the will of God alone, but he cannot be deified by it alone. A single will for creation, but two for deification. A single will to raise up the image, but two to make the image into a likeness. The love of God for man is so great that it cannot constrain; for there is no love without respect. Divine will always will submit itself to gropings, to detours, even to revolts of human will to bring it to a free consent: of such is divine providence...[88]

"The peak of all-powerfulness is thus received as a powerlessness of God, as a divine risk. The person is the highest creation of God only because God gives it the possibility of love, therefore of refusal. God risks the eternal ruin of His highest creation, precisely that it may be the highest. The paradox is irreducible: in his very greatness, which is to be able to become God, man is fallible..."[89]

Given that the state of sinlessness in which the human person existed at the beginning implied unhindered communion with God and that such communion constitutes the basis of the stability of human nature and of the incorruptibility and immortality it has by grace, the fathers are correct when they attribute to man before the Fall the condition of one who was incorruptible, immortal, and radiant in God's light. For nothing more was asked of man but that he continue, through his own will, in that state of sinlessness, so that by strengthening himself spiritually, the incorruptibility and immortality that had not as yet been fully assimilated into his person through virtue might become qualities of his own, definitively assimilated. Through sin, however, humans were brought down to death, which both was and was not something proper to their nature. Thus, on the one hand death and corruption belong to human nature when it remains within that relationship to God, which is natural to it; on the other hand they are contrary to the aspirations of the human nature that has been made out of nothing when it remains enclosed within itself. In other words, their relation to nature has the same paradoxical sense as the very notion of nature itself: on its own it is a reality distinct from God; yet at the same time it cannot come to exist or maintain and develop itself apart from the relationship to God, which is to say, apart from at least some kind of participation in him.

In answer to the question, "Can one say that Adam, in his paradisiacal condition, was really immortal?" Lossky gave the following reply:

> "God did not create death," says the Book of Wisdom. For archaic theology – St. Irenaeus, for example – Adam was neither necessarily mortal nor necessarily immortal: his nature, rich in possibilities, malleable, could be constantly nourished by grace and transformed by it to the point of surmounting all the risks of aging and death. The possibilities of mortality existed, but in order to be made impossible. Such was the test of Adam's freedom. The tree of life at the center of Paradise and its nourishing of immortality offered therefore a possibility... One must feed oneself with God to attain freely deification. And it is in this personal effort that Adam failed."[90]

Within malleable nature lies corruptibility, and to the extent that nature remains within itself and without soul, and the soul remains without God, this corruptibility becomes something actual. If the soul participates in God, however, it can acquire incorruptibility.

St. Athanasius wrote: "But men, having rejected things eternal, and, by counsel of the devil, turned to the things of corruption, became the cause of their own corruption in death, being... by nature corruptible, but destined, by the grace following from the partaking of the Word, to have escaped their natural state, had they remained good. For because of the Word dwelling in them, even their natural corruption did not come near them..."[91] Through the agency of the spirit that participates in God, the plane of incorruptibility, immortality, continual newness, freedom, liberation from that monotony of doing and undoing, which means death for the individual person – all this was opened up to human nature. St. Athanasius also said:

> Thus, then, God has made man, and willed that he should abide in incorruption... For transgression of the commandment was turning them back to their natural state, so that just as they have had their being out of nothing, so also, as might be expected, they might look for corruption into nothing in the course of time... For man is by nature mortal, inasmuch as he is made out of what is not; but by reason of his likeness to Him that is (and if he still preserved this likeness by keeping Him in his knowledge) he would stay his natural corruption, and remain incorrupt.[92]

Moreover, St. Symeon the New Theologian stated:

> Having been created out of the dust of the earth and having received the breath of life, according to the expression by which the Word indicates the understanding soul and the image of God, he [man] was placed in Paradise and received the order to cultivate and guard it. Why? Because, as long as man keeps the commandment and labors within it, he will remain immortal and will rival the angels perpetually; together with them he will praise God unceasingly, he will receive the illuminations that come therefrom, he will see God in Spirit (νοερῶς) and will hear his divine words. But from the moment when he transgresses the commandment given him and eats from the tree of which God forbade him to eat, he will be handed over to death and deprived of the eyes of the soul. He will be stripped of the raiment of the divine glory, his ears will be stopped, and, fallen away from a life lived in company with the angels, he will be driven away out of Paradise. This

> indeed happened to him who transgressed; he fell away from the immortal and eternal life.[93]

Thus, immortality depended on attachment to God, on orientation toward God, even through the senses. In the beginning, the eyes of man were not sources of the malicious and greedy glance that lies in wait and seizes for itself; his mouth was not habituated to cutting words, nor his ears ready to seize upon hostile or enticing senses in the words of others. The light of trust and goodness radiated from his face, and had humans endured in this relationship with God, the state of immortality would have been consolidated within them.

St. Symeon the New Theologian opposed the defiled activity of the senses after sin, now greedily attached to the material aspect of the world, to their previous operation before sin when they were guided by the spirit and trained respectfully on the spiritual reality of God beyond and through created things.

> Adam, having once transgressed God's commandment, having lent his ear to the whispering of the deceiving devil, and having been persuaded by him, listening to his evil words when he spoke against the Master who had created him, tasted of the tree. Moreover, casting around the eyes of his senses, he gazed with passion upon the nakedness of his body and he saw it, and rightfully was deprived of all goods, having become deaf so as no longer to hear the divine words with his defiled ears... nor any longer to have sight of that unutterable glory, since he had willingly wrested his mind away from it and looked with passion at the fruit of the tree...[94]

Since, before sin, the human being existed with God and neighbor in a harmony that was, so to speak, natural – even if it had not yet been consolidated by means of the virtues acquired through his own deeds – he also found himself in harmony with nature. His gentleness did not keep the animals from coming close to him. His greed neither defiled nor degraded nature. Because he saw God everywhere in nature, he had the feeling of being in it as in a cradle, and he did not destroy the protective mystery it wove around him by unraveling it with analyses and delvings. Through nature itself he saw beyond nature, and the force of his innocent spirit lent malleability to nature's processes. A great feeling of solidarity with all things granted him a peace with all things.

It would have been possible for humans to have become the "link" joining God and the whole of nature, according to the image of St. Maximus the Confessor. In direct contrast with the conceptions of pantheism, the human being is not destined to lose his individuality or to meld together with the cosmos into some impersonal whole, but on the contrary, the human being is the one who is to make of the world a personal reality.

> Man no longer saves himself through the universe, but the universe is saved through man. For man is the hypostasis of the whole cosmos, which participates in his nature. And the earth finds its personal meaning, hypostatic in man... The world follows man, since it is like him in nature: "the anthroposphere," one could say. And this anthropocosmic link is accomplished when that of the human image is accomplished, with God its prototype... We are therefore responsible for the world. We are the word, the *logos*, through which it bespeaks itself, and it depends solely on us whether it blasphemes or prays. Only through us can the cosmos, like the body that it prolongs, receive grace. For not only the soul, but the body of man is created in the image of God.[95]

It is only through the agency of the human person that the cosmos, which by origin is a "Logosphere," can become a "Christosphere" and a "Pneumatosphere."

Four

THE WORLD UNSEEN: ANGELS AND HUMAN LIFE

THE ANGELIC AND HUMAN WORLDS

The God of boundless riches does not stint when he creates. Creation is brought forth into existence so that it might reveal God and participate in the richness of his being, since creation has its own solidarity in this participation. Through its dimensions and its variety, therefore, creation reflects – to a certain degree and in a way proper to itself – this unlimited richness and participates in that richness under all forms. On the other hand, the revelation of God must be made to someone, that is, to particular spiritual beings. Hence, non-spiritual nature is not a true revelation of God except in virtue of the fact that there exist human beings who know God from and through nature and who come to recognize how, by revealing him, nature participates in God, and how they themselves participate in God, too, in an even greater measure and one that is more in conformity with him. Nevertheless, the knowledge of God that comes by means of the visible world to which the human person is bound is not the only way to know him. Another mode of God's revelation must also exist, and with it another mode of knowing him and participating in him, one not bound to visible symbols and hence more befitting the divine spirituality and more proportionate to his being.

Dionysius the Areopagite stated:

> Compared with the things that merely are, with irrational forms of life and indeed with our own rational natures, the holy ranks of heavenly beings are obviously superior in what

> thay have received of God's largess. Their thinking processes imitate the divine. They look on the divine likeness with a transcendent eye. They model their intellects on him. Hence it is natural for them to enter into a more generous communion with the Deity because they are forever marching toward the heights, because, as permitted, they are drawn to a concentration of an unfailing love for God, because they immaterially receive undiluted the original enlightenment, and because, ordered by such enlightenment, theirs is a life of total intelligence.[96]

Had God created only incarnate spirits, we should have imagined that the supreme being can only be known through sensible forms. This would imply that the supreme being is itself in some fashion a sensible subject and that matter is linked ontologically to the existence of the absolute. Moreover, such a view would cast doubt upon creation itself. Were matter inseparable from the absolute being, it would deprive that being of its capacity of creation and confer upon it a pantheistic character.

The existence of created but incorporeal spirits shows us then the possibility of a direct knowledge of spiritual reality, a direct communication between spirit and spirit. From this result two modes or planes of the revelation of God: one directly spiritual, and one that occurs through sensible forms. Moreover, since the spirit is found on many levels, a multiplicity of levels within the spiritual creation also results. Yet, since God is one, creation also must be a unity, and the spirits who have knowledge – whether these are with or without bodies – must be able to grasp this unity in their mutual solidarity.

On the other hand, the more diverse the forms of revealing God and of participating in him, the more is bestowed from God's riches upon each one capable of observing and knowing them. For this purpose God makes use of all forms of revelation. These modes, communicated from one subject who has knowledge to another, enrich the knowledge and understanding of each one. Thus, the result is an immeasurably rich or sobornic knowledge in regard to God that belongs to the whole of creation.[97]

In fact, divine revelation tells us of a world of incorporeal spirits who are found to be in solidarity with men and with the sensible world. With respect to the moment when the world of spirits was created, Holy Scripture contains only one reference. This is found in Job and treats that moment as anterior to the creation of the sensible world and of man: "When the stars were made, all my angels praised me loudly" (Job 38:7.) The opinion of most of the fathers is that the angels were created before the creation of the sensible world and man. They even place the angelic world within a kind of supra-temporal aeon, but one that is not coeternal with God. This represents a mode of life similar to that wherein creation as a whole will be found on the plane of eschatology, but it is through time that the sensible world advances toward it. St. Basil spoke of a kind of state older than the creation of the world, supra-temporal, aeonic, eternal, one proper to the supraterrestrial powers. It is in this state or aeon that the author and creator of all things will have created the spiritual, invisible creatures.[98] In the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite the angels are likewise treated as aeonic existences, transcending time, but not coeternal with God, for he was even before the aeon. They mediate between eternity and time; in the words of Dionysius:

> Actually, the designation "eternity" [*aion*] is frequently given to something very ancient or, again, to the whole course of earthly time, since it is characteristic of eternity to be very old, unchanging, and the measure of being. Time, on the other hand, has to do with the process of change manifested, for instance, in birth, death, and variety. Hence, theology tells us that we who are bound by time are destined to have a share of eternity when at last we attain the incorruptible, unchanging

> Eternity... strictly speaking, what Scripture discusses and denotes is that eternity is the home of being, while time is the home of things that come to be. Therefore it must not be imagined that things named as eternal are simply coeternal with the God who precedes eternity. No. Better here to follow carefully the sacred words of Scripture and to take "eternal" and "temporal" in the sense appropriate to them. And we should look upon those things which share partly in eternity and partly in time as somehow midway between things which are and things which are coming-to-be.[99]

Perhaps prior to the Fall, the human being had both aeonic existence and temporal existence before him. Had he strengthened himself in his steadfastness in the good, he would have become aeonic and existed within a period of time overwhelmed by eternity, although this must not be taken to mean the absence of all possibility of making progress in the good. For although the angels, too, are aeonic, they advance unceasingly and unchangeably in God. Nevertheless, through the Fall, the human person entered into a time that was marked by change, corruption, and death, though this does not have to be immediately understood in the way that Karl Barth does, for example, as a time of total and inevitable sin, for even this time after sin continues to stand in relation to eternity and to yearn after it.

Since the angels have the mission of helping human beings understand the reality of God from the beginning of their human existence, they themselves must be in existence when the human being and that sensible world to which he is linked jointly make their appearance. All that is necessary for the human being must be in existence when he appears. On the other hand, if the angels are created not only for their own happiness, but also to help humans know God through the sensible symbols of the world and master the sensible spirit, there must be no interruption between the creation of the angels and the creation of the world. Because angels have the mission of helping the human being raise up both himself and the world into the aeon, that is, into a time overwhelmed by eternity, they are created in ontological connection with the world. The incorporeal spirits help humans make this ascent both in the realm of knowledge and in that of spiritual and ethical growth and strengthening. Yet, the angels too gain from their relationship with humans. They communicate to human beings an experience of God not derived from the senses, while human beings communicate to them a more sensible experience of God, that is, God's revelation through what might be called "the aesthetics of the spirit."

As long as God stood at some distance from human beings, knowledge of him was communicated to them in greater part by means of angels. Because angels are more accessible to them, human beings received through the angels a certain firmness in their intuition of the absolute, an absolute that still remained far removed from human beings spiritually. That is why the New Testament says that the old law was given through angels (Gal 3:19; Heb 2:2; Acts 7:53). But when the Son of God becomes incarnate, the divinity reveals itself through the experience and transfiguration of things human in a manner that can neither be experienced nor understood by angels. For this reason St. Paul said that it is from the Church that the angels discover "the manifold wisdom of God" (Eph 3: 10) revealed to men by Christ.

The angels know the divine spirituality by means of a simple intuition, more or less intense, of God, an intuition they communicate to human beings who lay hold of it in symbols. But when the Son of God takes on flesh, he himself manifests his own all-wise reality and life in manifold sensible acts. The "manifold wisdom" means not just a multiplicity, but a sensible multiplicity. This is a more accessible mode of God's revelation to the human being and implies on the part of God a closer approach to the human being, a greater interest in the human being and in the problems he has in the body, a manifestation of a greater love for humans. This is a revelation that comes through sensitivity, through the manifold of spiritual beauty, through acts performed in the realm of sensible reality. It is a revelation of God that comes by way of a greater kenosis, and – precisely because of this – it is the manifestation of a greater love.

The existence of the angels, as undefined structures for communicating the infinite depth of God, not only throws into relief this divine depth; it also tests the human being in a difficult way, examining whether he allows himself to be tempted into viewing the world of spirits as ultimate reality after the manner of the various theosophical and anthroposophical doctrines. To discern the God who communicates himself through spirits, but yet is not identical with them is a mark of great subtlety, a subtlety acquired by the capacity of perception that belongs to the human spirit. Not to consider the angels above Christ, who is God in the flesh (Col 1: 16), is a mark of great spiritual refinement.

Within this same purpose, however, of transmitting the knowledge of God to humans, the order or orders of spiritual beings must number enough to surpass our power of comprehension, if, that is, they are to communicate their knowledge of the supreme existence in modes of reflection, participation, and understanding that escape definition, and if they are to communicate these same modes to men, just as men, too, communicate what is theirs to angels. Through this angelic-human sobornicity, the volume and variety of knowledge undergo an immeasurably greater increase.

In fact, it is within the boundless ocean of spiritual lights and knowing subjects that the richness of the divine life and thought finds its reflection. For this there can be no analogy except what is suggested by the multitude of human structures or by the ocean of heavenly particles and bodies that make up the material world.

Dionysius the Areopagite wrote:

> I think we also ought to reflect on the tradition in Scripture that the angels number a thousand times a thousand and ten thousand times ten thousand. These numbers, enormous to us, square and multiply themselves and thereby indicate clearly that the ranks of the heavenly beings are innumerable. So numerous indeed are the blessed armies of transcendent intelligent beings that they surpass the fragile and limited realm of our physical numbers. Only a conception and understanding of their own kind – transcendent and heavenly, the blessed gift to them of the Deity and the all-knowing creator of wisdom – could know them and define them.[100]

St. John Chrysostom spoke of the "infinite populations of bodiless powers" whose thousands nobody can count.[101] Clement of Alexandria presupposed that "the angels are infinite" in number.[102]

Infinity here does not mean the absence of all limit to their number, but the impossibility that human beings should ever come to an end of counting them. Dionysius the Areopagite said, as we have seen, that the heavenly beings are so numerous and so perfect that only he who sustains their order is able to know them.[103]

The variety of bodiless powers is as great as that existing among the peoples of the visible world, indeed much greater. St. John Chrysostom observed: "There are angels, archangels, thrones, dominations, principalities, and powers. However, they are not the only virtues who dwell in the heavens. There are tribes and nations without limit or number, and which no words can set them before your minds as St. Paul says (Eph 1:2 1), [for] there are names in heaven that are going to be known but are unknown now."[104] The fathers spoke of the "infinite" variety of the spiritual powers, an infinity that manifests the infinite richness of the imagination and the power of God. The prairie of this "infinite" multitude of spirits heralds the infinite glory of God. A creation that includes as conscious beings only human persons – even billions of human persons – would be a poor creation. Moreover, were God to be in dialogue with human persons only, that dialogue would be monotonous indeed, and the enrichment derived from it a meager affair.

However, if God wants to be known by all created conscious beings to the greatest extent possible, then the link between the incorporeal spirits and human beings must be such that it forms a single creation. Through this link a single common revelation of the one God comes about.

The fathers saw the unity of creation in the fact that the angels have been created in order to serve the plan of man's salvation, a plan conceived from all eternity by God.[105] Clearly, this does not mean that the angels were not also created for the sake of their own happiness, just as humans were. But it is in the communion of all that this happiness is attained by both men and angels. In this communion, moreover, the angels, as superior beings, are assigned a certain role in helping us. However, though angels are superior to humans from one point of view, they nevertheless make themselves servants of our salvation and thereby also of our human mission to spiritualize the visible creation. If it is true that the human subject is enriched according to the extent of his relations with more and more human subjects and to the extent that these same human subjects find themselves on higher levels of spirituality, the human subject will certainly be that much more enriched if he is in relationship with a great multitude of angelic subjects who exist on higher spiritual planes.

St. Gregory Palamas said: "Before us and for us God created the angels whom he sends to serve those who, as Paul says (Heb 1:14), would inherit salvation."[106] "The manifold and numberless multitude of the angels was created for the sake of man"[107] that through the angelic spirituality the divine presence and spirituality (in itself inaccessible) might radiate into all the realms corresponding to the levels on which human beings find themselves. It is in this sense that St. Gregory Palamas, citing Dionysius the Areopagite, spoke of various configurations of the angelic spirits that differ according to one or other of the features marking the superabundant divine spirituality. He also spoke of the influence which these configurations exert upon the spirits who are found on levels inferior to their own.

Consequently, it is because of their configuration in accordance with the divine model that the being of the angelic hosts themselves has its characteristic feature. Thus Dionysius the Areopagite remarked: "[the angels' dominion] is forever striving mightily toward the true dominion and the true source of all dominion. Benevolently and in accordance with capacity, it receives – as do its subordinates – the semblance of that domination."[108] And in another place: "...the holy ranks of heavenly beings... [in their] thinking processes imitate the divine (νοητῶς ἑαυτὰς ὑποτυποῦσαι). They look on the divine likeness with a transcendent eye. They model their intellects on him (μορφοῦν ἐφιέμεναι τὸ νοερὸν αὐτῶν εἶδος). Hence it is natural for them to enter into a more generous communion with the Deity."[109]

The superiority that, from one point of view, the angels possess is not denied by the fact that they also function as servants of human beings for the sake of their salvation. The highest in rank often serves the lowest, especially when he thereby shows forth his own glory in the important mission he is fulfilling. Those who are higher give service to others in one way, those who are lower in another. The lower serve in order to have a share in the superiority of the higher, or from a necessity to obey, or from a certain dependence that is implied in the "minus" or negative dimension of their existence. The higher ones serve in the consciousness of a responsibility, a duty to help the lower ones and bring them to share in their own "surplus" of existence or grace.

The very Son of God makes himself the servant of human beings. The human being is served both by those beneath him and by those above him. That is why he enters creation last. For he enters as a master, the lower beings having to serve his vital needs and the higher angels his salvation.[110] Theodoret of Cyrrhus said that after God had created the sensible and intelligible worlds, he created the human being so that all the sensible world might be of use to him, while the intelligible beings, namely, the angels, might show their care for him.[111] This is so because, from one point of view, the human being is cast more in the image of God than the angels are. He has the creative gift in a way the angels do not. At the same time, the human being has the onerous mission of spiritualizing the visible world, of rejecting the temptations of body and world together, and thereby of transfiguring material nature.

If beauty consists in the manifestation of the spirit through matter, the irradiation of the living spirit through the living body is the greatest beauty. This irradiation occurs, moreover, when the body is no longer mastered by materiality, but through materiality the body's higher qualities become transparent in unimpeded fashion. This fact does not demand artistic talent so much as ethical effort. The saint may be said to have realized in himself the true beauty of the human being: decency, balance, captivating spiritual light.

In this work of spiritualizing matter, which is proper to the human person, all spiritual beings and God himself move to help him strengthen his spirit. The temptations that come to the human being from the body and from the visible world are great, but the work he has been given to do, if he achieves it, is just as important. That is why the human being is helped by God and by the incorporeal spirits. For through this assistance the divine spirituality discloses itself in a new form, or, better, the multitude of the divine characteristics finds as many sensible images as there are human beings.

As the human being's model, the Son of God himself, by becoming man, takes upon himself this task of the spiritualizing of the human being. He does this first in himself and then in the rest of human beings, and, through them, he assumes the further task of spiritualizing the sensible universe, a work of revealing the Godhead through the agency of material forms.

To this end the human being was given the capacity to be master over the material order, and it is in this capacity that he is, more than the angels, in the image of God, as both St. John of Damascus and St. Gregory Palamas put it.

The angel is only a servant of God and of the human being, while the human being is, in addition, master (*archon*). Without doubt, through the service offered to the human being, the angel, too, contributes to the human being's mastery over matter. But the angel is master only inasmuch as he serves humans. The human being comes to know the angel in the intensification of his spiritual power until it reaches a degree that exceeds his own natural power. "The angels were emphatically ordained to serve the Creator and destined only to be ruled but were not appointed to rule those after them unless perhaps they should be sent for this purpose by the ruler of the universe... [whereas] man was appointed not only to be ruled but also to rule all things on earth."[112]

> Not in this respect alone has man been created in the image of God more so than the angels, namely, in that he possesses within himself both a sustaining and life-giving power, but also as regards dominion. Contained in the nature of our soul there is on the one hand a faculty of governance and dominion and on the other hand one of natural servitude and obedience. Will, appetite, sense perception, and generally those things subsequent to the mind were created by God together with the mind, even though we are sometimes disposed toward sin in our will and rebel not only against our God and universal sovereign, but also against the ruling power belonging to us by nature. Nevertheless, because of the faculty of

> dominion within us, God gave us lordship over all the earth. But angels do not have a body joined to them so that it is subject to the mind.[113]

"The fallen angels have acquired an intellectual will that is perpetually evil, while the good angels have acquired one that is perpetually good and required no charioteer at all. The evil one did not own, rather he stole power over the earth, whence it is clear that he was not created as ruler of the earth. The good angels were appointed by the universal sovereign to keep watch over the affairs of earth after our fall and the reduction of our rank that ensued, even though it was not complete because of God's love for mankind."[114]

The creative gift is bound up with the mission of spiritual mastery. By spiritualizing matter humans give it the transparency that can make the divine spirituality visible in many forms. In particular, this creative gift is a means whereby the image is made spiritual as beauty, and beauty reaches its fullness when it possesses purity within itself. This gift gives humans kinship with the Creator, who is in himself spiritual beauty. He has given existence to so many visible forms that are capable of revealing his spirituality as unstained and endless beauty. According to St. Basil the Great, a longing for that pure, luminous beauty was instilled in humans, a longing that conceals the longing for God. For "what is more worthy of admiration than the divine beauty?" And it is to advance the revelation of that beauty that angels, too, serve humans.[115] According to Nemesius of Emesa, "it is peculiar to man alone to learn arts, sciences, and to practice the arts."[116] The human being alone knows how to master the elements, drain the seas, tame the animals, and communicate through writing with whomever he wishes over long distances.[117] He alone, through painting, sculpture, architecture, and poetry, can discover the profound beauty of human nature that radiates from God and is partly covered over by sin.

From a moral point of view, the human being's spiritual power over nature is strengthened through the angels, although the latter have no direct rule over nature.

The privileged position of man in the cosmos is seen especially, however, in the fact that the Son of God became a man, not an angel, and that on the divine throne, together with his human nature, he is made master of the angels. He became man because through his human nature alone could he gather within himself and deify the whole of creation, including material creation. Had he become an angel, he could not have deified all of creation. Nevertheless, he also gathers the angels in himself, for at the same time he is the all-encompassing Spirit. In creating human beings, God has created more than just spirits; he has created spirits whose manifestation is linked with the reasons of created things, and these in turn have sensibility as their ultimate expression. Hence, the reason of the human spirit is capable, too, of seizing and comprehending the reasons of things and is capable of a sensibility. Through a sensibility that belongs to the human body, it perceives the reasons of things and therefore, precisely by means of this perception, the sensibility of the human body is proper to the spirit as well. This agrees with what the fathers say about the "feeling of the mind."

Through this feeling which is proper to the human being, the human spirit binds the material order of existence to itself. Sometimes the mind lets itself be mastered by this feeling and enslaves itself to material things,[118] but its mission is to purify this feeling. The Son of God, moreover, because he assumes the human mind together with the sensibility that is linked to it by nature, binds this sensibility to himself and deifies it.

ANGELIC AND HUMAN KNOWLEDGE

The reality of the angelic world and the link between it and our own sensible world certainly give rise to two questions. First, is a knowledge of God possible without the mediation of symbols? That is to say, how does the created angelic spirit come to know the divine Spirit – who is above all knowledge – apart from the mediation of symbols? And second, how do the incorporeal spirits have knowledge of our sensible world when they have no organs of sense knowledge? That is, how in general do they know a reality apart from any impressing upon their own sensibility of the forms belonging to sensible reality or of certain symbols that correspond to non-sensible realities?

The answer to the first question seems easier. The human spirit itself can have knowledge of certain logical principles in themselves, although the occasion for this knowledge was provided to the spirit by its life in the body and by knowledge of the sensible world. We see no reason why the incorporeal spirits should not come to know these rational principles directly, and others higher still. Besides, the human spirit knows certain presences and realities that cannot be reduced to what is material, even though the occasion for this knowledge is provided by certain perceptions of a material kind. For example, the human spirit apprehends its fellow human beings as subjects and perceives their various spiritual states. It experiences the pressure exerted by these realities and a certain mode of their being, although to a large extent they remain apophatic, or undefined, and never completely understood. There exists yet another "feeling of the mind" beyond that which comes through material symbols, and when the fathers use the expression "feeling of the mind," it is to this that they are referring. We do not see why the incorporeal spirits could not also have the feeling of a certain pressure exerted by spiritual presences, which is exerted apart from the mediation of sensible images by spiritual presences of an ineffable although sufficiently determinate kind. Finally, the human subject experiences the pressure of a supreme and unconditioned spiritual authority, even though this authority comes to be felt through a certain process whereby it impresses itself even on the bodily organization of the human subject. We do not see why the bodiless spirits should not also experience the pressure of a similar power without that impression being prolonged within a somatic being. After all, these pressures are all experienced by the human subject, too, and experienced as spiritual pressures within his own spirit. Moreover, as they are much clearer, they may rightly be named illuminations. The impression they make upon the organization of the body only prolongs the experience of that pressure. Ultimately, the human being knows God by his ability to respond in an unconditioned way to the supreme spiritual pressure exerted by this authority, a responsibility experienced within his very being. Why should the angels not experience this unconditioned responsibility in themselves even more clearly than the human being does, since the angels are not disturbed in the subtlety of this experience by the body being attracted to preoccupations of a more external kind?

Harder to answer is the question as to how the angels know the purely material realities of our world. But perhaps they, too, have sensibility – though of a totally different kind – for the rational structures of material reality (for the Wesensschau of every reality), so that they feel the pressure of these structures upon their spirit. On the other hand, because the angels know humans as subjects, they know in them all these lived impressions of the world, which have both become spiritual contents and spiritual states in humans and at the same time have called these forth within them. We can presuppose that angels are able to enter into so intimate an interior communion with men that they can see through human eyes as if they were their own and together with humans can feel the joys and pains that the sensible world gives rise to in the former, just as, in their images and symbols, humans, too, can appropriate from the angels a more intelligible vision.

We can further presuppose that, as created spirits the angels nevertheless have a certain intrinsic capacity to perceive and influence the material world, although this capacity does not come to equal that of the human spirit, which is rooted in the body. It may be in this sense that some of the fathers and Byzantine authors even speak of a most subtle "body" belonging to the angels as, for example, St. Basil the Great and Michael Psellos do on the basis of Psalm 103:4: "Who makes His angels spirits and His servants a flaming fire."[119]

In this manner, but also by way of divine grace, the angels can come to some sort of knowledge even of the material aspects of created things. Certainly, the mode of this knowledge ultimately remains impossible for us to understand fully.

With respect to what the angels contribute to the human knowledge of God, we mention a text from Dionysius the Areopagite in addition to those indicated in Holy Scripture. He said that

> the holy ranks of heavenly beings... have the first and the most diverse participation in the divine and they, in turn, provide the first and most diverse revelations of the divine hiddenness. That is why they have a preeminent right to the title of angel or messenger, since it is they who pass on to us these revelations that are so far beyond us. Indeed, the Word of God teaches us that the Law was given to us by the angels (Gal. 3:19). Before the days of the Law and after it had come, it was the angels who uplifted our illustrious ancestors toward the divine, and they did so by prescribing roles of conduct, by turning them from wandering and sin to the tight way of truth, or by coming to announce and explain sacred orders, hidden visions, or transcendent mysteries, or divine prophecies.[120]

The idea of a direct revelation of God to humans runs through the writings of Dionysius the Areopagite to such an extent, however, that his conception can only be understood in the sense that all human knowledge of God has a certain symbolic character. But the believer is always aware that it is

God who is revealing himself to him through the symbolic utterance or through images in the strict sense. Symbolic utterance and images that refer to God have infinite meanings; moreover, men are helped to a great extent by angels in the discovery of these meanings. For with their understanding, the angels penetrate to those infinite meanings that take form in symbols.

Consequently, God's revelations to humans can be said to be assisted by the angels.

Dionysius the Areopagite directly affirmed that the whole of divine revelation was effected through visions, or through images. The images, moreover, although produced directly by God, receive explanation through angels:

> Someone might claim that God had appeared Himself and without intermediaries to some of the saints. But, in fact it should be realized that Scripture has clearly shown that "no one has ever seen" (Jn 1:18) or ever will see the being of God in all its hiddenness. Of course God has appeared to certain pious men in ways that were in keeping with his divinity. He has come in certain sacred visions fashioned to suit the beholders. This kind of vision, that is to say, where the formless God is represented in forms, is rightly described by theological discourse as a theophany. The recipients of such visions are lifted up to the divine. They are granted divine enlightenment and are somehow initiated in the divine things themselves. Yet it was the heavenly powers that initiated our venerable ancestors to these divine visions.[121]

St. Gregory Palamas retained from Dionysius the notion that visions are produced directly by God as means through which he makes himself known but that their explication occurs through angels. He thereby emphasized the idea of a reciprocity between angels and humans in regard to the knowledge of God. In particular, men have part in a direct revelation of God, beginning from the incarnation of the Son of God, while the angels also come to know this revelation through the agency of men.

St. Gregory Palamas thus placed a more emphatic accent on the immediate human knowledge of God. Nevertheless, he still maintained that angels and humans form a reciprocal complement to one another.

> Thus not only in angels, but also in us direct visions of God take place, not merely indirect visions or those mediated through others; they are visions that do not reach those in the second rank by being conveyed from those in the first. For the Lord of lords is not subject to the laws of creation. According to our teaching, therefore, Gabriel is the first and only one initiated into the mystery of the unutterable self-emptying of the Word, even though he is not from the host of angels in the first rank and established directly near to God. The beginning of the new creation must be new... Therefore, ascending into heaven, he makes the angels in the inferior host, that is, those surrounding the world, as St. Cyril puts it, to be illuminators and perfecters of the superior host. Thus is given them the possibility to ask those who are superior to "lift up the eternal gates" and teach them that He who was clothed in a body because of an unutterable love for men will enter and ascend and take his seat above every rule and authority. For He is the Lord of powers and the King of glory, capable of all things, and able, should he wish, to make the last greater than the first. But before the appearance of God in the flesh we learned of nothing similar among the angels... [Now that grace has been revealed,] there is no need for mediation. The great Paul also says this: "that through the Church, the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places" (Eph 3: 10). The same is said by Peter, the coryphaeus of the apostles: "the things which have now been announced to you by those who preached the good news to you through the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look" (1 Pet 1: 12). In this way the lesser ones are made greater by grace and the harmonious order is maintained in a sure and marvelous way... You may then see that while the grace of knowledge is mostly given through mediation, most

> visions of God are seen directly. That is why Scripture says that in the time of Moses the model of the law was given through angels, but not the vision and appearance of God; it was the explanation of the vision that came by angels.[122]

In Christ, the risen body becomes so transparent a medium for divinity that even those who are lower down see this divinity and consequently do not have such need for explanation from the angels who are higher up; indeed, in some fashion the lower ones even come first, for the humanity that Christ has in common with them is a further source for their knowledge of the divinity. It is rather the depths of the divinity that the angels know, whereas for humans it is the mystery of the divinity made evident through resurrection.

Thus, St. Gregory Palamas stressed the flexible character of the hierarchical order of the knowledge of God even more. He reconciled hierarchical order with direct contact with God and also with direct knowledge of God in the persons of those placed in the lower hierarchical levels. The hierarchy is maintained, however, in nature, and if someone on the higher level comes to know something through the mediation of one on the lower level, he nevertheless generally keeps some role in explaining what is communicated directly to the one lower down.

In general, these texts of Dionysius the Areopagite and especially of St. Gregory Palamas indicate the idea of reciprocal completion of knowledge between angels and human beings.

Our knowledge is mediated by sensible symbols. In symbols the angels help us penetrate to the depths of what is beyond the senses. From these symbols communicated to humans, however, the angels themselves discover something new about God; or rather, they discover new contents and new modes of the divine revelation and goodness. They are able to intuit more clearly the spiritual contents of the symbols they discover, that is to say, the depth of their meanings. On the other hand, angels do not have that manifold sensible experience in which, for the sake of humankind, something of the divine content becomes the object of intuition. Because, as incarnate spirit, he has his own experiences of life, while God moreover has made these experiences his own in Christ, the believer understands them, but not in all their depth. The believer gives God the opportunity to come down to man's level in manifesting His love. Thus, through this descent of God to humans as well as through the knowledge humans have, the angels find out new things about God's love; yet they also make a contribution to the understanding of the depth of this love. In the absence of the human being there could be neither angelic nor general knowledge of the extent to which God is capable of showing condescension and love. Because, as a being, the human person is both spiritual and sensible, he alone is capable of grasping this kind of sensible and extreme condescension on the part of God. The angels are not capable of receiving and experiencing inwardly this "aesthetic" (sensible) revelation of God. If they do "see" the sensible forms through which God reveals himself to humans, they are primarily seeing in some fashion the internal structure of these forms.

The help given humans by angels so that they can penetrate the spiritual meanings of the sensible forms in which God reveals himself to them becomes less and less necessary as humans progress in spiritual perception, that is, according to the measure of their spiritual progress toward the angelic state. But to the extent that these sensible forms are overwhelmed by the divine spirituality, the angels become capable of grasping them by themselves. This is the sense in which – as Dionysius the Areopagite put it – in the future life we will become like the angels. A more intimate communion between humans and angels will be brought about.

We now grasp these things in the best way we can, and as they come to us, wrapped in the sacred veils of that love toward humanity with which Scripture and hierarchical traditions cover the truths of the mind with things derived from the realm of the senses. And so it is that the Transcendent is clothed in terms of being, with shape and form on things which have neither, and numerous symbols are employed to convey the varied attributes of what is an imageless and supranatural simplicity. But in time to come, when we are incorruptible and immortal, when we have come at last to the blessed inheritance of being like Christ, then, as Scripture says, "we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess 4:17). In most holy contemplation we shall be ever filled with the sight of God shining gloriously around us as once it shone for the disciples at the divine transfiguration. And there we shall be, our minds away from passion and from earth, and we shall have a conceptual gift of light from Him and, somehow, in a way we cannot know, we shall be united with Him and, our understanding carried away, blessedly happy, we shall be struck by His blazing light. Marvelously, our minds will be like those in the heavens above. We shall be "equal to angels and sons of God, being sons of the resurrection" (Lk 20:36). That is what the truth of Scripture affirms.

But as for now, what happens is this. We use whatever appropriate symbols we can for the things of God. With these analogies we are raised upward toward the truth of the mind's vision, a truth that is simple and one. We leave behind us all our own notions of the divine. We call a halt to the activities of our minds and, to the extent that is proper, we approach the ray that transcends being. Here, in a manner no words can describe, preexisted all the goals of all knowledge and it is of a kind that neither intelligence nor speech can lay hold of, nor can it at all be contemplated since it surpasses everything and is wholly beyond our capacity to know it. Transcendently it contains within itself the boundaries of every natural knowledge, and energy. At the same time it is established by an unlimited power beyond all the celestial minds. And if all

> knowledge of that which is and is limited to the realm of the existent, then whatever transcends being must also transcend knowledge.[123]

In any case, even when it becomes this transcendent knowledge, the human knowledge of God is occasioned by sensible symbols, or begins from them. We have here an analogy with the knowledge of one another that human subjects share among themselves. I lose myself in contemplation of a "Thou" because of the occasion offered by an encounter with that person's visible reality. Jesus, too, as God incarnate, represents such an occasion, even in his most transfigured form, whereas angelic knowledge is not occasioned by visible symbols. The transfiguration of the symbol, however, the lightning flash of the "Thou" through the visible reality of one who is my neighbor, does not come about through my will alone, but through an act that has its origin from above. This act comes from God, but it is very likely that God raises us up into what is infinite through the agency of angels, namely through the agency of one angel who constitutes a model of the person known and another constituting a model of the person who knows. But it is not in every case that our contemplation of an immaterial reality leads to our submersion in the infinite. When that does happen, we can presume that an angel is at work. For although the angel is a spiritual reality, he is also – unlike God – a structured spiritual reality, able to be grasped as such, and this makes it easier for us to grasp the structured spiritual realities related to him. How often does there not appear through the spiritual beauty of a human "Thou" an intensified beauty structured after the image of this "Thou"? In the final analysis, the beauty of the "Thou" is certainly intensified by having the divine light projected upon it, but when this intensification is too fleeting, it appears rather as something that has been given its structure by the angel who serves as model.

On the other hand, however much a "Thou" or our own "I" – or even, through this, its "model" angel – might appear to us as a structured reality, this structure is not rigidly enclosed; it opens up access for us not only into the undefined, but also into the infinite. In the moments of grace that belong to the contemplation of a "Thou" or of our own "I," we are aware both of the specific and clearly structured character of that "Thou" or of our own "I," and of its lack of boundary, the fact that it swims in an infinity flowing from the interior reality beyond itself, as well as of its capacity for infinite openness toward others. Thus through "I" or "Thou" we can be said to contemplate the angel, and through the angel, the divine infinity. In the interior reality of the human being the angel is found, and in the interior reality of the angel God is found. They have their place on a ladder, but the steps of the ladder are transparent.

This possibility for an angel to communicate interiorly with the incarnate human spirit shows again an ontological connection between incorporeal spirits and human incarnate spirits. The angels are not bearers of bodies directly, but they perceive what is spiritual when it is incarnate and live out the connection with it, feeling in the incarnate spirit something that is not spirit alone, and feeling the pressure exerted by the presence of the incarnate spirit together with all the experience gathered within it through life in the body. It does this in the same way that the incarnate spirit experiences the presence of the spirit, which is not incarnate.

The clarity of seeing the spiritual content of certain of God's sensible revelations – revelations made accessible to angels through the perception of these revelations by the human spirit – this clarity provides the human spirit with a more penetrating power for perceiving the content of these revelations, and more generally, with help needed for transcending the domain of the senses contemplatively and ethically, whether this takes the form either of God's supernatural revelation or of a natural revelation of the spiritual meanings of created things. This is how we think the explanations of the sensible images of that revelation, which is given to believers by angels, are to be understood.

The human being is not alone even when it seems that he is completely alone. On the contrary, it is precisely when he gathers himself from the scattering of his attention toward all kinds of created things and toward the memories of external things that he opens himself to the influence of certain spiritual presences. When he gathers himself together more in prayer, his prayer is animated by the prayer of one or many of the bodiless spirits, if indeed the prayer constitutes an inner opening toward the divine absolute. Evagrios the Monk said: "Know that the holy angels encourage us to pray and stand beside us, rejoicing and praying for us."[124] "If you pray truly, you will gain assurance; angels will come to you as they came to Daniel, and they will illuminate you with knowledge of the inner essences of created things."[125]

In the Church, a communion is brought about not only among her visible members, but with the angels as well. The sobornicity of the Church takes in the angels too.

Holy Scripture also speaks of a special connection between an angel and a human person. An angel joined in a special way with a human person by God must also be a special model for the latter. The multitude of angels must correspond to the multitude of human beings.

The ontological connection between the order of angels and our own order has more than just a general character; it is specified also in an interpersonal way. Surely, just as each human being develops spiritually in connection with all his fellow human beings, so, too, with the angelic world as a whole. The spiritual content of the entire angelic world, however, is communicated to and has influence over the spiritual content of the entire human world through the special link formed between the concretization of the angelic world within an individual angel and that of the human world within an individual person, for the angelic concretization represents a personal form of spiritual model proper to the temperament of a personal human concretization. Thus, the angels bring us more than just a new horizon of knowledge that frees us from monotony; they also help to develop our originality in the direction of a beauty marked by its purity and superior character. To artists in particular, these new horizons of understanding and harmony are opened in an original way proper to them, through their angels. For the angels, by praising God "with unceasing voice," give concrete form in lofty spiritual structures to the amazement produced in them by what is infinite in God and transcends all definition. These structures of harmonies and understandings, moreover, although not material, are yet perceptible to those endowed with a more developed and corresponding capacity of spiritual perception and expression.

We have seen, however, that we are not alone in receiving benefit from the angels, inasmuch as angels make symbols transparent or transfigured for us and direct us in the organization of sensible elements in such fashion that spiritual reality wells up through them. Yet through God's descent to the level of humans, and through the contemplative artistic activity of humans, angels, too, come to know the divine reality in new and beautiful forms, in actions that reveal more profoundly the sublime goodness and love of God for the most modest of his conscious creatures. The angels did not know how great was God's love for men until his Son became incarnate, nor did they come to know man's value as creature of God until Christ rose and ascended into heaven as man.

Explaining the words of St. Paul: "that through the Church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places" (Eph 3:10), St. Gregory of Nyssa said: "In previous ages [before the Church] the transcendent powers knew only the simple, uniform working of God's wisdom which effected wonders... On the other hand, the manifold quality of wisdom that arose from union of opposites is now clearly manifested through the Church: the Word becomes flesh, life is mixed with death, by his own bruises [Christ] heals our wound, brings down the adversary's power by the weakness of the cross, the invisible is manifested in flesh, Christ redeems captives."[126] St. Gregory of Nyssa also applied to the Ascension of the Lord the words from Ps 24:7- 10: "Lift up your heads, O gates, and be lifted up, O ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in. Who is the King of glory?" He said that until then the angels did not know to what glory the incarnate Word would be raised.[127] Commenting on the words of St. Paul: "He has shown himself to the angels" (1 Tim 3:16), St. John Chrysostom said that when he had shown himself to the angels, he was clothed in the body, but before then they did not see him, because for them, too, the essence is unseen.[128]

In general, angels do not know the future; therefore they did not know the destined glory of the world until after it was revealed as a promise to the Church. Nor do they even know the unexpressed thoughts of humans.[129] From creation, however, the angels do know the human capacity to make the divine majesty transparent, and they make one of their own proper capacities active in helping humans in the work of its transfiguration. Sensible creation is worked on from two sides in order to make it an astonishingly beautiful transparency of the Godhead: from above through the angels, and from within through humans. Herein lies the ontological solidarity of angels with humans and with the sensible world; in this consists the sense of those words describing the act of creation as a unitary act: "God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen 1: 1). Only when taken together do the sensible world, with the human being as its crown, and the intelligible world of the angels form a complete receptacle for God's revelation and for bringing that same revelation to full effect. Only together can angels and humans lift up to God an integral doxology. This is how we are to understand that the angels are created on the one hand to praise God and on the other to serve him in his care for humans, to be God's messengers to humans, his "heralds" and thereby to help raise them up to praise God in union with the angels who thus stand at the service of the salvation of humanity. But this implies that angels have a capacity to lead humans to God and that they themselves increase their own knowledge of God and their own doxology in this way, as joining theirs with that of humans. The angelic-human choir is more majestic than the human or the angelic choir taken by itself. The part of the choir that is angelic and the part that is human completes and embellishes the other reciprocally. Each of the two parts profits from the other in the *élan* of the doxology.

Some of the fathers have underlined the superiority of angels compared with humans on the basis of their being "pure minds," not connected with the body and its resulting desires. Others, as we have seen, have affirmed that the human being is more in the image of God, since through the body he both is and becomes a "master" of the world, like God, whereas the angels lack this attribute.

However, the need humans have for the world and their capacity to do with it as they wish – these represent a temptation drawing men to attach themselves to the world and to trust in their own creative powers. Therein lies the greatness of incarnate spirits, and the danger of man's fall. In the domination of desires a new force can be actuated among spirits. But these desires can also close off the infinite horizons toward which the human spirit is called. The hardships inseparable from life in the body can develop in the human being a properly human responsibility along with the noble impulse to help his neighbor with deeds, a responsibility and capacity lacking in the angel. The same hardships, however, can also develop selfishness and exaggerated worldly concern.

In any case, to the human being was given the glorious mission of dominating matter by means of the spirit, of making it transparent to the spiritual and divine order, and of bringing about new modes of revealing the spirit and helping his fellow human beings, particularly those modes that are ethical and aesthetic.

In return, the pure spirit, or the angel, has a clarity of thought and an *amor intellectualis* that are difficult for human beings to imagine. Yet before such a spirit was consolidated in the good, it, too, was stalked by another form of selfishness and enjoyed no blood relationship to other beings who might put obstacles in the way of this selfishness. It was threatened by the unlimited selfishness of the pride of knowledge and self-existence and freedom from the cares of the body.

Let us not imagine, however, that just because humans can bring to light undefined aspects of the divine reasons of the cosmos, angels do not see them, too, by means of their own power of intellectual penetration. That is why sparks emanating from the angels sometimes catch fire over deeds done on behalf of men and produce what are called inspirations. These sparks are kindled in particular in the case of those who contemplate created things with a mind undisturbed by passions. Moreover, they lead men to discover combinations of sensible forms and harmonious combinations of colors, sounds, and words so that new meanings and new aspects of beauty inherent in them may be revealed.

The principal operation of the angels is not, properly speaking, to act directly upon nature, but upon human subjects so that these may be strengthened and sustained in their action of spiritualizing material things and of remaining detached from these same material realities and the impact they make on human bodies, and through these bodies, on the exterior world. As subjects whose own spirituality makes them much more stable, the angels infuse strength into human subjects in order to stamp upon their bodies a spirituality perceptible to the senses. For the mission of the angels goes beyond enriching humans' knowledge of God; it also includes imparting to them energetic help toward their goal of spiritualization so that humans may thereby come to know God more easily. In this sense the angels were created in solidarity with the sensible world. If in the sensible revelation of God through the human person the spirit of the human person is also revealed, this revelation can also be said to imply the firm support accorded the human subject by angels. In a spiritualized human body – one detached from what is material – something of the spirituality of the angels is visible.

If the activity of angels is not trained upon the cosmos, as it is with humans who make use of the members of the body and of tools as extensions of the body, nevertheless, there can be no denying that angels exercise a direct effectiveness upon the forces of the cosmos. To deny this would mean denying in general the very effectiveness of the human spirit in giving form to the human body. The dialogue that is conducted between the believer and God by means of acts and is brought into being through the cosmos, does not exclude a certain angelic participation. Indeed, Holy Scripture affirms such an effectiveness: an angel closed the mouths of the lions when Daniel was thrown among them. St. Gregory of Nazianzus declared that different individuals of them [the spiritual powers] "embracing different parts of the world, [are] appointed over different districts of the universe, as He knows, who ordered and distributed it all."[130]

In the matter of the spiritualization of creation, however, the angels work through the faithful. And if in this sense we can see through the human person to the angel and through the angel within the human person to God, then we also understand how it is that the angelic hierarchy implies no separation of man from God. All creation exists within an interior concentration and sobornicity, and this in turn implies that each subject is responsible for and bound to serve all the others just as all together must serve and be responsible for each individual. Whoever falls away from this sobornicity falls away into a shadow of existence.

THE ANGELIC HIERARCHY

As regards the angelic hierarchy, Dionysius the Areopagite understood the angelic hosts as nine in number and arranged in three superimposed groups: Seraphim, Cherubim, Thrones; Dominations, Virtues, Powers; Principalities, Archangels, Angels. All are in motion in their passage through purification, illumination, and perfection. When the lower host from each group is in the phase of purification, the one in the middle is in the phase of illumination, and the higher one in the phase of perfection. After this, the higher hosts pass on once more to a loftier purification, those in the middle to a higher perfection, and the lower ones to a more sublime illumination. The hosts further down are helped in this ascent by those higher up.

The first host in every group, by rising above the perfection in which it finds itself – for it sees the limits of that perfection – is purified from it. This ascent is entirely an ascent in the knowledge of God and in the perfection that comes through ever-increasing participation in him. Purification represents a species of apophatic renunciation of the consciousness possessed by one level in order to rise to a higher illumination, and consequently, a higher perfection. This ascent takes place in a spiral motion around God that draws closer and closer to him. "Originating in God's will, [the mind] will be with its desire and love around Him, as around a center. For the second ones are not united with the ones that precede them, but what happens is like a round dance, those produced wishing to embrace in a circular manner those who have produced them; but they only look round about and are filled with His beauty... For since the divinity is everywhere, those who follow it everywhere and wish to know it rejoice in this and dance about, as if circling in their understanding."[131] Indeed, the whole of created existence moves in a continuously circular way around God, straining toward its cause. Strictly speaking, an infinite ascent could not take place on an ascending straight line because those on a lower level would always be looking only at those above them, and not directly at God.

Between these three phases that succeed one another continuously there is no opposition, only continuity and development.

> The participation itself in the divine knowledge is purification, illumination, and perfection: purifying ignorance by the knowledge of more perfect initiations according to the rank of one's own state;... illuminating by that very knowledge itself through which it also purifies the power which had no knowledge before... and again perfecting by means of the very light in that habitual knowledge of the lofty and brightest meanings... Whence purification purifies from ignorance, but not every one purified has yet come to the heights. To the purified one illumination comes in turn and perfects [him], and this is a more perfect enlightenment and illumination.[132]

On the other hand, even in illumination and perfection there is an apophatic note sustaining the impulse toward ascent, for any knowledge of God is accompanied by the consciousness of insufficient knowledge and by the desire to go beyond present knowledge.[133] Moreover, the divine light in which the angelic hosts are found on various levels is common to all, not something separate, and received by all directly at their several levels. Nor from this point of view does hierarchy mean that some angelic hosts are interposed between God and the hosts on a lower level. "Everyone has this not in a manner particular to each, but all are common to all, according to the grace of God towards them... For the three hosts are brought together into one ... having in common both the first light and the first given knowledge ... [The middle hosts being included between those at the sides; while these are united in it] and thus the three hosts are gathered in one, and what is given to each in particular by grace, they primarily possess in common."[134]

The Greek theologian Trembelas holds that the placing of the angels into a hierarchy of nine groups is to be taken as a personal opinion of Dionysius the Areopagite, especially since other fathers name fewer groups and do not arrange them in the same way.[135] In general, however, a hierarchy of angels was affirmed by some fathers before Dionysius, even though they provided no complete system for it. Such a hierarchy is already admitted in *The Shepherd* of Hermas and after him by St. Cyril of Jerusalem.[136]

St. Basil declared that the Seraphim have "been accorded a position closer [to God] in virtue of the highest holiness" and that "the dignity of a leader is greater than that of someone entrusted with the protection of an individual," and that "although the angels share the same nature, one is their leader, while another is subject," and that the angels are arranged in legions.[137]

St. John of Damascus made the hierarchy of Dionysius the Areopagite his own, as do all the fathers after Dionysius.[138] Moreover, the Church gave her consent through the introduction of the angelic hierarchy into iconography.

Clearly, this hierarchical distribution into the three triads, recapitulated in its ascent through the three phases, must be taken only as a symbolic expression of a fullness inherent in their number – three – and representative of the perfection of the Trinity and of an ascension in solidarity according to the full ordering of the spiritual life. Patristic Christianity makes use of symbols to express progress made by the spiritual order into the infinite. The angelic world forms an extremely numerous assembly (*sobor*), which is no mere juxtaposition, but a unity maintained through inner relations by contrast with humans who together form the "human race" not on the basis of spiritual relations alone, but also through blood. Iconography depicts some of the angelic hosts as interwoven or in tightly formed groups. The angelic hosts all sing praise to God in perfect harmony, and so the angels know God together and impart the joy of that knowledge to one another.

Each of the three orders is found in the image of the Holy Trinity, while the outside members of each group meet in the middle one, in a perfect unity that also reflects the unity of the Holy Trinity. In addition, the three triads are united in the same way. "Some say that the lowest angel is also called Seraphim, according to the same principle of communion spoken of above, for the lowest ones participate in the highest, and the highest in the lower, although the latter do so totally, while the former partially and in a more obscure manner."[139]

The motion of spiritual beings is movement of ascension, which will last etenally. St. Gregory Palamas said: "The proof for this hiddenness beyond all knowledge is Moses' desire, request, and ascent toward a more and more acute seeing, but also the continuous advance of the angels and of the saints in the endless age toward ever clearer visions..."[140] The created subject never comes to an end in the act of understanding the absolute subject. But this movement is at the same time given the name of stability because the motion is maintained permanently in its path. This is the stability of angels. "How is it that they both stand and also move? It is clear that they do stand, assisting [at the throne], but they also move toward that illumination. For, although the universe, to give it this name, moves circularly, it is also eternally mobile and unmoved. It is unmoved as a whole for it does not pass from one place to another, but it is eternally in motion according to its parts. So it is with the heavenly *Perichoresis*. For it, too, is stable in an eternally mobile way, as it were remaining fixed turning eternally round its center and inclining toward it, which is not the case with linear motion."[141]

Thus there exists a gradual development of the spiritual world, not a passive development only, but one that implies an operation of its own. On the other hand, however, because it is consolidated in the good and in communion with God, this development is stable, a continual ascent from stage to stage, from glory to glory.

There is a link that joins the ascent of the angelic world to that of the human world (indeed of the sensible world in general) if it is true that "there is joy before the angels of God over one sinner who repents" (Lk 15: 10), and if it as true that the angels have grown in the knowledge of God's love because of the Incarnation of his Son and his ascension with the body (as man) into heaven to the divine throne, that is to say, through all that has been imparted to the Church (Eph 3:10).

This universal ascent is eternal. Dionysius the Areopagite understood it as a helical movement around God that draws continuously nearer to him, a kind of "column of the infinite" in ascending motion that simultaneously approaches nearer to God.[142] This eternal movement goes in the direction of the divine persons of the Holy Trinity, and especially toward the Son of God who, seated as man on the divine throne, manifests in a thoroughly transparent manner the depth of his life and judgments through his humanity. St. John Chrysostom, on the basis of St. Paul's words in Eph 1:10 and Col 1:20, said that the angels, too, have been recapitulated together with the human person in the common head of the Church, which is Christ, and have thereby drawn closer to one another (see Heb 12:22-23).[143]

Five

THE WORLD UNSEEN: ENEMIES OF THE GOOD

EVIL IN THE CREATED ORDER

The created reality of the world of spirits not only has an unbounded luminous summit; it also has an unbounded depth of shadow. The first is formed of the good angels, the second from the world of the evil angels.

Holy Scripture tells us that in the beginning this world of evil spirits formed part of the world of the good angels, but because of their revolt, they were flung down from heaven. These spirits, too, are of indefinitely great number and possess their own hierarchy. Their leader is Satan. St. Basil, describing the fall of Satan in contrast to the steadfastness of the archangel Gabriel, saw the fate of each in the freedom of developing his constancy in, or his separation from, God.

> Why is man evil? Because of his own freedom. Why is the devil evil? For the same cause, having also a life of free choice, and through his freedom, having the responsibility to remain near God or to alienate himself from the good. Gabriel was an angel and remained near God for eternity. Satan was an angel and has fallen wholly from his state. Free will protected the former on high; freedom of choice has thrown down the latter. The former was able to fall and the latter able not to have fallen. The former was saved by his insatiability for the love of God; the latter was cast out through his estrangement from God. This is what evil is: estrangement from God. A small turning of the eye will either put us in position with the sun or with the shadow of our body. He who looks toward

> the sun is disposed for enlightenment; he who turns toward the shadow will necessarily be darkened. Thus the devil is evil because he has chosen freely, but his nature itself is not opposed to the good."[144]

Only the Christian explanation that evil has its origin in freedom avoids linking evil to the essence of reality – whether reality as eternal or understood as that created by God – while at the same time taking it seriously. It is the only explanation, moreover, that allows for genuine freedom in the reality of existence. Any other explanation irremediably compromises existence and denies freedom, which is to say, the dignity itself of the human being. Had evil been created by God, it would have been linked to the essence of God and of creation, just as it would have been linked eternally to existence.

St. Basil the Great said:

> Do not consider God as the cause for the existence of evil, nor imagine evil as having its own existence. For evil is not subsistent the way an animal might be; nor can we see its essence substantiated. For evil is absence of the good. The eye was created, but blindness ensued through the loss of the eyes... So, too, evil does not have its own subsistence, but it follows upon the wounds of the soul. For it is neither uncreated, as the impious say who hold evil in the same honor as the good nature, considering both of these to be without beginning and superior to generation; nor is it created, for if all things are from God, how can evil be from good? For nothing that is vile comes from the beautiful, nor does evil come from virtue.[145]

The doctrine concerning spirits also existed in Babylon, Persia, and Greece, but it differed entirely from the biblical doctrine, inasmuch as there it was the expression of an eternal dualism, whereas the biblical doctrine does not accord evil an eternal existence equal to that of God.[146]

On the other hand, the extent of evil in the world and in man cannot be explained by human freedom alone. If we want an explanation that takes account of the mass of evil, yet without treating it as though it were an attribute of reality overwhelming any hope the human being might have to escape it through his freedom, then we must admit, as a supplementary origin for evil, the freedom of certain spirits mightier than the human spirit and capable of much greater evil. No origin of evil can be posited within the freedom of the almighty divine spirit, however, for that would no longer make possible the salvation of the world from evil, and God would no longer be God.

Although some human beings do manage not to be subjects of evil, in practice, many remain its subjects. It seems to us an indisputable fact that this evil is greater than the sum of those evils that humans do to one another, that, above the human being, amplifiers exist who magnify the evil done by humans to such an extent that humans can no longer escape from it by themselves. The threads of evil humans use to tie each other up are spun and thickened until they form a complex of ties that cannot be undone.

In other words, evil manifests proportions and powers that cannot be explained by human freedom alone. On the other hand, however, the human being can keep evil in check and, as a subject who does evil, can be delivered from it almost entirely, not through his efforts alone, but through his efforts assisted by the power of God. Evil, therefore, does not prove to be something the human being cannot conquer in his capacity as subject who brings evil about.

Even while the human being is mastered by evil, it is still the case that he almost always retains in himself the remnants of good, resistance to evil, power to return to the good, power to check evil and repent of it.

Christian faith holds that alone the demonic spirits no longer retain any remnant of good in themselves. For them evil has become a "second nature." Yet even that evil produced by the more powerful of the spirits appears as something having its origin in their freedom, not in their very being, as something to which they constantly give consent through their freedom. This leads us to understand that even if all humans ceased to be subjects of evil, evil would still hover over their lives from other voluntary sources higher than themselves. But the very possibility humans have to liberate themselves from their quality as subjects of evil simultaneously reveals that the evil from which they suffer does not belong to the essence of reality but comes from the freedom of certain more powerful beings.

Precisely because evil does not belong to the essence of reality (*ens*) or to the essence of a part of reality (which would, in fact, compromise irremediably the whole of reality, for one part of reality cannot be separated from another), evil plainly cannot have existed from all eternity and possesses within itself a certain weakness.

On the other hand, the evil that hurts and gives most pain is the evil produced by a person through his freedom. Physical evil, or evil done unwillingly, does not hurt the sufferer as much as it pains the one who inflicts it through his awareness that he could have avoided doing it. Evil as physical happening (death, sickness, earthquakes), as the product of higher forces, or as consequence of an evil already committed can keep alive a kind of tragic feeling, and with a patience that fortifies spiritually and saves, be borne as a cross. Only the evil that is done by a person intentionally produces moral pain in the sufferer and feelings of injustice and misunderstanding, while in the one who inflicts the evil it leads to the sufferings of regret or – when these sufferings are absent – to moral change.

All this serves to confirm the Christian teaching that evil, as something greater in extent than what can be explained through recourse to human freedom, has its origin in the free decision of certain created spirits who were good in the beginning.

The explanation of evil through personal freedom, however, accounts for only one of its aspects; it does not account for that dimension, which grows even stronger once evil has settled into existence.

Evil is more than just an act of freedom devoid of content; it is an act whose content consists in making use of the powers of human nature, but in a way that is opposed to that same nature. St. Maximus the Confessor said:

> Evil is the diverting of the activities of the powers implanted in nature from their purpose and nothing else. Especially after it has been produced; or those who produced it have became accustomed to producing it, the evil increases the weakness of nature or of its powers, or the accommodation of using them against nature. Thus, having become disobedient and ignorant of God, [the first man] stubbornly mixed the whole of his thinking power with the whole of his sense perception and thus took to his embrace a knowledge of sensible things that was composite, deadly, and productive of passions."[147]

Evil thus means a "minus" in existence, a minus that increases continually. With this aspect in view, the holy fathers said that evil is a non-existence (μὴ ὄν), or an existence without consistence. It is not total lack of existence, but a diminishment, an essential weakening of existence, a deprivation of what truly constitutes the support of existence (τὸ ὄν). The evil that had entered existence thereby distorts the being of the latter and in this way weakens it. This distortion and weakening have their origin in freedom, however, and their duration in the consent of freedom. They do not take their place in being apart from freedom, nor are they maintained without its consent. Evil can, therefore, be said simultaneously not to originate in being, nor to be connected with it. It is through the will that being can be healed, but only through will helped by the grace of God, that is, by an act of his will, which has its source in his being that can be neither distorted nor weakened.

This distortion or weakening of human nature shows itself in the passions produced by acts contrary to the good, which is to say, contrary to God. These passions dominate the human being and reveal a weakened nature wherein certain tendencies that the human being cannot control are put in motion. This is the result of evil. The devil, too, is possessed by a passion of this kind, a passion that it is not physical, but purely spiritual. In the beginning is the passion of pride; then it becomes the passion of hatred for both God and the human person.

But the paradox of evil lies, on the one hand, in the violent frenzy moving these passions and, on the other hand, in the weakness of the one who is mastered by them. He cannot escape at all; the human being can escape only with the help of divine grace. It is a curious mixture of weakness and of the will to remain in it. Moreover, the weakness contains in itself an element of violence, for it consists in the fact that the one enslaved to it cannot escape from his passions and no longer has the strength to do otherwise. The envious person cannot escape from envy and does not see what is good in the one he envies. Evil is a violent impotence, or an impotence of violence, and uncertain of existence.

In the passions and the violence they display, there is a simultaneous weakening of what is characteristic of person and an accentuating of what is characteristic of nature. We are not speaking here of nature in itself, but of a nature that is so called because it does not allow itself to be guided by the freedom activated by person. Animated as it is by the spirit, human nature is a nature proper to person and to freedom; it is nature hypostatized. The passions represent the departure of nature from the power belonging to the fully personal state, that is, the power of freedom and of its full subsistence. The man who is no longer completely human has become inhuman because he has become, in part, impersonal and this nature of his is no longer completely consistent, which means that it is no longer in full communion with the nature found in other persons. Personalized nature feels in itself the power that comes to it from full relation to the nature found in other persons because it can thereby be continually both source and continuous recipient of new acts and thoughts that are generous, good, and at the same time original, for in every person nature finds an original expression of itself while remaining simultaneously in communion with all other persons. By its openness and the reciprocal enrichment it receives in these positive relationships between persons, nature understood in this way is profoundly human and creative.

When, in every case, nature had fallen into this condition of unfulfilled personalization, it broke up into fragments that do not communicate fully among themselves, and into individuals who shut each other out and, instead of enriching one another, remain within a selfish poverty, sinking deeper and deeper while each strives to annex the other to himself so as to enrich himself with what the other has, against the other's will. This tendency in the one provokes the same tendency in the others, and a general struggle ensues among them, and consequently, a general weakening of nature. In the highest degree, this condition belongs to the demons also. They co-exist because they need to torment one another and to fight against those who are good. This co-existence of battle has become for them a necessity and attests to the fact that no one can live totally cut off from those who possess the same nature. "Thus, the unique nature has been cut up into countless particles, and we who possess the same nature devour each other as the reptiles and the beasts do."[148] Evil is violent not in order to build up existence, but so as to diminish and destroy it; this is the violence of those who are impotent to strengthen themselves in existence, the violence of those greedy to wax fat at the expense of others. It is the avalanche set off by a reality that seeks its enrichment wrongly and so hurtles down towards nothingness; it is the violence of a reality that wishes to hold itself in existence without God, the source of existence, and without the voluntary and loving contribution of others, which because of pride, it does not seek. Yet the avalanche has its cause in free will and is sustained by it.

Some of the angels fell because of their decision to separate themselves from God, but the reason for the fall lies in pride. They wanted to be independent from God, to be exactly like God. St. Paul helps us understand this in his recommendation that someone recently baptized (and hence spiritually immature) should not be ordained bishop "or he may be puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil" (1 Tim 3:6).

Pride explains the revolt and disobedience of the fallen angels, but revolt and disobedience imply the prior condition of subordinate status and a refusal to remain within that status. Thus, a more far-reaching explanation of evil is to be found in the will of certain created spirits inferior to God who wanted to raise themselves above their condition, and hence, to be by essence, through this straining of theirs, more than they were. Herein lies the positive force manifested in evil: in that tendency implanted by God himself in the lower spirits, to raise themselves higher than their present position. The evil does not consist in making actual this impulse, but in doing it in a false way. These angels wanted to become like God, that is, the source of existence, without developing in relationship with the source of existence, and hence not through God or in relation to him, but apart from him and independently through themselves. Precisely because of this they ruptured communication with the single source of existence. Christ came so that through him humans "may have life, and have it abundantly" (Jn 10: 10). The whole New Testament insists on the fact that men *have life* and are *called to life* "in Christ." Thus, God does wish to satisfy that thirst for life and for more abundant life, which is found in created spirits, but the evil spirits and human beings have fallen away from this life because they wanted to satisfy this thirst outside of God. Herein consists both the positive force of evil and its weakness.

The thirst for more abundant life is linked so closely to the being of these spirits, however, that it is never exhausted by its own failures to be slaked from sources that are not real sources of life. That is why the demons are left in eternal existence by God: they show forth eternally that positive thirst for life placed in them by God and the eternal impotence of satisfying oneself apart from God. Eternally they renew their ambition to have their being through themselves (*per se*) just as they renew their envious hatred for him who in fact alone exists through himself. This, too, represents a vast power in that positive will to be and to be abundantly, but a power evilly misused. The demons are deluded into thinking that their independence can make them not only greater but also absolute. (Indeed it belongs to the logic of pride that one possessed of it aims at being by himself and hence absolute). They want to be not only more abundantly, but also to reach the pinnacle of absolute existence. And the possibility is given them of maintaining this striving eternally, of believing that one day they will reach this pinnacle. Exist they will, and eternally, but they will be incapable of breaking through to know the source of existence and partake of it; they will exist forever, but within an existence of spiritual death. The very fact that eternity was bestowed on them contributes to their untiring delusion. And this delusion finds its explanation and growth in the fact that God has hidden his glory from them because they put themselves at such a spiritual distance from him, inasmuch as for them God's very existence has almost become something questionable.

THE DEMONS AND HUMAN DESTINY

Genesis presents the contribution made by Satan to the fall of man by showing him tempting man not to obey the commandment of God. This work of temptation is carried on by Satan unceasingly (Acts 5:3; 1 Cor 7:5; 10: 13; 1 Thess 3:5). He tempted even Jesus Christ (Mt 4: 1; Mk 1: 13; Lk 4:2). The masters of the spiritual life say much about a battle the evil spirits wage against us. In this battle their method is to make use of that same delusion that governs them. They direct the human being's thirst for his own deification into their own false path, which has ended in failure, for it is not their wish that God become visible through the human being, as his partner within an infinite communion in love. Satan hates the appearance and the glory of God wherever it is seen, and he hates God; he hates the human being as image of God and would not want him to have any relation with God or to acknowledge him.

In this way he attracts the human being, when he can, into an alliance with himself against God. His struggle is against the human being who wants to realize himself in God. Moreover, he makes those whom he has won over to his own position fight against their fellow humans who wish to persevere in the process of realizing themselves in God. He even fights against peace and unity among humans, for in human unity, the unifying force of God is seen because unity actually comes about in God through the humility some show toward others, and this is humility toward God as well.

Through his struggle Satan draws humans into the same banality of existence, the same incapacity of seeing its infinite spiritual perspectives, the same darkness and horrifying "minus" of existence, and the same violence of those passions that enfeeble the spirit and dim the vision of God. He strives to lure humans into the same "abyss" of the void, and to this end, he urges them to trample under foot all the divine laws in order to introduce disorder in creation and thus to undermine it.[149]

All of this is found in St. Basil the Great, who describes the reason for Satan's struggle:

> Whence, therefore, does his war against us come? From the fact that being the vessel of all evil, he has also received the sickness of envy, and he envied our honor. For he could not stand our carefree life in paradise. Therefore, by deceiving man with tricks and evil methods and by making deceptive use of the desire in man to attain to the likeness of God, he showed him the tree and promised him that he would become like God by eating from it... He was not created as our enemy, but he became our enemy through envy. For when he saw himself cast out from among the angels, he could not endure to see the earthly one raised to the level of the angels through progress [in virtue].[150]

Hence, his battle against us goes on without a pause. "For nothing is sweeter to the hostile spirits than to bring the envied man, honored with the divine image, down to such a shameful state"[151] as to bow down to what is inferior to him and to take pride in perversion, corruption, and death.

God has also made of this struggle that the devil wages an occasion whereby, with the help of divine grace, we can grow stronger in the good.

> Therefore, the devil has become our adversary for our fall produced by his temptation long ago. But the Lord gave us the occasion and the possibility to fight against him, so that through obedience we may oppose him and be crowned through the victory against the enemy. It would have been good for him not to become the devil, but to have remained in the rank where he had been placed from the beginning by the Captain of the ranks! But once he became apostate, the enemy of God and of man who was created in the image of God (for this is why he is the enemy of man, because he is the enemy of God and hates us as creatures of the Master, as likenesses of God), the wise one who guides human affairs through providence used the wickedness [of Satan] to exercise our souls, as a doctor uses the venom of the viper to prepare healing medicine.[152]

Thus, while the angels fulfill their positive role, willed by God, of helping humans grow in existence, perfection, and that unity found in God and in real knowledge of his infinite glory and love, the evil spirits fulfill a role opposed to this in all aspects. Through the good angels, God with his infinite depths, becomes transparent to us, and we remain in dialogue with him as we persist in those depths; through the evil spirits we are drawn into the banality of an existence that is opaque, devoid of meaning, and ends in death. Just as demonic existence is, by reason of its process of inner diminishment, ultimately an active death and from this death inconsistency extends over all that is attached to it, the existence of those deceived by demons becomes the same: an existence in death, a violent existence of inconsistent nightmare, moving among impotent and tormented shadows fettered to the surface of reality, and spreading over others this torment of banality and impotence. It is the death of conscious loneliness, or death through a conscious loneliness that is powerless to bring about communion, but breathes out its envy on those who find themselves within some kind of communion and drags them toward that same death of loneliness.

If the good angels are close to God, ordered in degrees of nearness to him, but at the same time close to humans – among whom those who are most good enjoy a stronger perception of them – so the evil spirits are far from God, but close to humans and possessed of a strong influence over those who are evil among them. Not only do certain bad human beings perceive them; so also do some of those who are spiritually advanced. In the human passions and in the passion-inspired relationships of those under the sway of demons, these spirits teem as in some seething and pestilential swamp, and their inner propensities resemble these passions, just as the pure angelic impulses are akin to the virtues and the pure and noble thoughts of good humans. If it is true that good angels can dwell permanently in bodies kept under control and particularly in good souls with their pure minds, then evil spirits are even more solidly at home in bodies ravaged by impulses of the passions both in their lower parts and also in minds that are framing malign thoughts. These kinds of corporal manifestations of the demons are more evident, for they are closer to the world and to humans because human beings under their sway are more numerous, and their own role is to lord it over humans, whereas the role of the good angels is to free humans and help them be truly themselves, lacking pride of any kind. The presence of the evil spirits in the people they dominate shows itself in their clouded and shrivelled faces, their unbridled laughter, unrestrained and obscene words, and their thoughtless actions.

On account of the strict mastery evil spirits exercise over those impelled by the passions, people also talk about a kind of possession by the demons and of corporal manifestations or appearances asssociated with them. This intimacy has the effect of making the passions produced and sustained by the demons in a certain sense their own possessions. On the other hand, since their desire is to attract the passions of certain men toward persons and things, the evil spirits glisten from the attractive appearances coming to the surface of those same persons and things. In this sense, spirits are said to be present in water, fire, money, beautiful things, or persons of the opposite sex.

St. Paul the Apostle declares that these spirits are scattered throughout the atmosphere, which is to say, everywhere around us, and that they hold sway over the darkness of this age. This means that they extend darkness over this life, hinder us from making our way through to the light beyond it, and thus render the world opaque for us (Eph 6:12). They bind us to the surface of created things, as the ascetical writings say, by making it beautiful, though with a glamour that is neither spiritual nor transparent, and by presenting this surface as if it were the ultimate reality, all the while refusing to let us penetrate through to the inner meanings of things. Our Savior names the devil "the ruler of this world" (Jn 12:31, 14:30, 16:11), and the world he means is the world regarded in itself, in its opaque surface. This decaying but still attractive surface Satan can give as a gift, and he promised it even to Christ (Mt 4:9).

Michael Psellos said:

> In this way the demons speak to us in a hidden manner, so that we may not feel where the war comes from... The demonic bodies [we would say corporal manifestations], taking from their imaginative substance whatever images and colors and forms they wish, introduce them into our soul and spirit, and thence they show us many things, suggest advice to us, display to us forms, refresh the memories of certain pleasures, images of passions, disturb us both when we are awake and asleep, sometimes excite our genital organs through titillation, urging them toward mad and sinful loves, and to this end, making use frequently of the warm fluids within us. By introducing themselves into our imaginative spirit, since they themselves are also spirits, they inspire the words of passion and pleasure.[153]

As spirits they can infiltrate so deeply into our souls and bodies that their "I" comes close to uniting with our own "I," so that it is hard to distinguish the manifestation of what is ours from what is theirs. That is why the fathers call for attentiveness and great sobriety when dealing with "phantasms" and other products of the imagination.

Because the demons are close to humans who have different kinds of passions and because they are responsible for feeding these passions within them, the demons have something akin to humans within themselves. That is why they are distinguished according to the groups of those overmastered by each of the various passions. St. John Cassian, for example, spoke of the eight spirits proper to the eight passions (the spirit of gluttony, unchastity, avarice, anger, dejection, sloth, vainglory, and pride).[154] But these work in solidarity for the purpose of having the passions succeed one another in a chain. Even pride, which might seem to be the most spiritual of the passions, comes from attachment to the surface of the world, from not seeing God as the world's infinite personal support, for if God were seen in that way it would take away from the created spirit any occasion for pride. Sadness comes against our will, almost imperceptibly, on account of failure in worldly matters of greater or lesser importance. It can lead to despair and suicide. At first the evil spirit approaches like an ant, but his purpose is to grow slowly and little by little until he becomes as strong as a lion. Some he makes mute with sadness; some deaf to the words of others. But he also works upon the body and upon the world around us in order to produce things that attract us or harmful and damaging things that sadden us, make us angry, and weaken our faith in God.

St. Maximus the Confessor said:

> The evil and the destructive kingdom of the devil... first incites the craving power to desire the things that are against nature, urging it to choose the sensible instead of the intelligible; then it stirs up the irascible element to fight for the sensible thing that was chosen by desire; finally it teaches the reason to invent various modes of the sensual pleasures [in order thus to serve the senses]. In a word, it places the sensible things as masters over these powers [of the soul], or sets the earthly law as lord over the faculties of the soul... [The devil] hides invisibly in the appearances of sensible things and through each of the senses calls forth the desire of the soul deceptively towards each of these. [He] makes every passion to be dominated by something that corresponds to sensible things... The face of the devil is the softness of pleasure and through it he dominates every soul that hastens to receive it and that prefers the sensible things that entice the senses to that contemplation of intelligible things that enrich the mind.[155]

The fight against temptations from the evil spirits demands both shrewdness to detect them from the outset as well as concentrated effort and untiring perseverance to keep ourselves from being brought under their sway. This struggle cannot be fought successfully by the human person alone. Both strength and success in the fight come from the body of Christ, itself pure and the source of the power of purification.

If it is true that Satan compromised the body and its human sensibility and the surface of the world that is perceptible to the senses, it is also true that Christ has reestablished the worth of the body and of the sensible world. The soul he made the bearer of deity and thereby reestablished the purity of the body and of its sensibility, just as he restored the world's role as a transparency for God. Christ has shown that evil is not linked to the body and the world in some fatal fashion. At the same time he restored the power of the human will to restrain that domination that the surface of the world held over the body by reason of the latter's sensible nature. In Christ the body and its senses have become what they ought to have been – means for apprehending the sensible world in purity – while the world itself has become a place transparent of the presence of God.

If evil were connected to the body and the world in an essential manner, then the Incarnation of the Son of God would have had no purpose, and the same is true were humans irremediably dominated by evil. It was only because evil was not bound up essentially with the very being of the human person and the world – and because it was not produced by the exclusive initiative of the human person, who was more than just the author of evil but also its passive victim, and who, through what remained in him of the good, protested unceasingly against the evil to which he was tempted – it was only for this reason that the Son of God became incarnate and had the power to destroy the devil's works even through the body (1 Jn 3:8).

On the other hand, any real progress of our own and of our relations with our fellow human beings can only be achieved through struggle with the passions and aided by the grace of Christ who opposes any fall of his human nature under the slavery of the passions.

Six

THE FALL

THE TREE OF THE KNOWLEDGE OF GOOD AND EVIL

We do not know how long the human being remained in the primordial state. In any case, he did not undertake to consolidate his own obedience to God or to grow in the knowledge of him, for had he done so, the Fall would not have come about so easily, or it would not have come about at all. St. Maximus the Confessor said:

> Perhaps the creation of visible things was called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because it has both spiritual reasons that nourish the mind and a natural power that charms the senses and yet perverts the mind. Therefore, when spiritually contemplated, it offers the knowledge of the good, while when received bodily it offers the knowledge of evil. For to those who partake of it in the body, it becomes a teacher of passions, leading them to forget about divine things. Maybe that is why God had forbidden man the knowledge of good and evil, postponing for a while the partaking of it so that first of all, as was right – man knowing his own cause by communing with it in grace, and through this communion, changing the immortality given him by grace into freedom from passions and unchangeability, like one already becomes a god through deification – he, together with God, should gaze harmlessly and fearlessly on God's creatures and receive knowledge of them as God, not as man, possessing by grace and with wisdom the same understanding of things as God, thanks to the transfiguring of the mind and senses through deification.[156]

Likewise, Nicetas Stethatos, developing this idea, declared that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is sensation applied to the sensible world or to the body. The human being was able to contemplate sensible things without danger by means of the sense faculties under the guidance of the mind. To behold sensible things through sense faculties not yet under the guidance of such a strengthened mind was, however, dangerous. Thus, the human being needed to grow first until he was capable of beholding the world with his sense faculties under direction from a mind that had become spiritual.[157]

The same opinion was expressed by St. Gregory Palamas, who is even more precise:

> Therefore, while they lived in that sacred land, it was to the profit of our ancestors and it was incumbent upon them never to have forgotten God, to have become still more practiced and, as it were, schooled in the simple, true realities of goodness and to have become accomplished in the habit of contemplation. But experience of things pleasant to the sense is of no profit to those who are still imperfect, those who are in mid-course and who, compared with the strength of the experienced, are easily displaced toward good or its opposite.[158]

We might infer that the primordial state lasted only a very short while, for in this state halfway between obedience and disobedience, our first parents were obliged from the very beginning to show themselves either as obedient or as disobedient. Had they shown themselves obedient over a period of time, they would have begun to be habituated to good, and so the Fall would have become a more difficult thing. It would seem, therefore, that they let themselves be overcome at once by the temptation to disobedience.

The expression "primordial state" thus points to that condition of our first parents when they came into existence through the creative act of God, and in which, as in their normal state, they were called to remain and to grow. St. Basil the Great spoke directly of the "rapidity" with which Adam decided in favour of disobedience, but he, too, affirmed the real existence of a short period of time prior to this decision for evil. He helps us to understand that, strictly speaking, the primordial state means that the human being did not come forth as intrinsically evil from the creative act of God, but that evil was chosen by the human being. Hence he had a short period of time in which to make up his mind before choosing. God could not create the human being evil, but he wanted man to strengthen himself in the good through his own cooperation as well. St. Basil even spoke of a certain complacency in the human being that came from his having everything. For the human being, all things lay too much ready at hand before he had grown spiritually by his efforts to win these things for himself. Instead of deciding to expend that effort required if he was to persist and advance in his participation in things that were good but less sensible, he preferred rather to choose enjoyment, without effort, of those good things more easily grasped. The fact that nature, too, was beautiful and rich in a way corresponding to the beauty of the intelligible meanings and realities constituted a further temptation for man to enjoy what was at hand rather than what demanded effort if he was to know and enjoy it.

> Adam was above, not spatially, but by the will, when, recently given (ἄϱτι) soul and looking towards heaven, he rejoiced at what he had seen, loving the Benefactor who granted him the enjoyment of eternal life, rested upon him the pleasures of paradise, gave him mastery like that of the angels, and an existence like that of the archangels, and made him a hearer of the heavenly voice. Protected in all these matters by God and enjoying His good things, he was soon (ταχύ) satiated with everything and became somehow insolent in his repletion, preferring the delight appearing before the eyes of the flesh to intelligible beauty and placing a full belly above spiritual enjoyments. At once he was outside paradise, outside that

> happy way of life, not evil from necessity, but from lack of wisdom (ἀβουλία). Thus he sinned because of a wicked choice and died because of sin.[159]

The *aboulia* of which St. Basil spoke partly means imprudence and partly lack of will, or laziness of the will. The human being had fallen because of imprudence and laziness in expending the effort to make use of his freedom. God wanted man to grow in freedom through his own effort. Freedom, as a sign of spiritual power, is more than just a gift; it is also a result of effort. From the beginning man refused that effort and so has fallen into the slavery of the easy pleasure afforded by the senses. God breathed spirit into man, but the spirit breathed into him was in great part a potency that man needed to make pass into act. By commanding man not to eat from the tree of consciousness before he was guided by freedom of the spirit, God, in fact, commanded him to be strong, to remain free, and to grow in spirit, that is, in freedom. This very commandment made appeal to man's freedom.

The human fall away from God consisted formally in an act of disobedience. Through that very act the human being detached himself interiorly from God and from positive dialogue with him. He no longer responded to God, believing that he was thereby affirming his freedom, and autonomy. In fact, it was this act that marked the beginning of the human's selfish confinement within himself. This was how he enslaved himself to himself. Reckoning on becoming his own lord, he became his own slave. The human person is free only if he is free also from himself for the sake of others, in love, and if he is free for God who is the source of freedom because he is the source of love. But disobedience used as an occasion the commandment not to taste from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The fathers cited above imply that by the two trees we are to understand one and the same world: viewed through a mind moved by spirit, that world is the tree of life that puts us in relationship with God; but viewed and made use of through a consciousness that has been detached from the mind moved by spirit, it represents the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which severs man from God.

St. Gregory of Nyssa asserted this in his own way when he analyzed the ambiguous character of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. The permitted tree of life is every thing, or rather every instance of knowledge and experience, through which man advances in real goodness. The forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil is likewise every thing, or every instance of knowledge and experience of which man partakes, but in this case when he is led astray by the idea that it is good, when in reality it is evil. "...for surely it is clear to all who are at all keen-sighted what that 'every' tree is whose fruit is life, and what again that mixed tree is whose end is death: for he who presents ungrudgingly the enjoyment of 'every' tree, surely by same reason and forethought keeps man from participating in those which are of doubtful kind."[160]

Like the fathers mentioned above, St. Gregory of Nyssa saw the tree of knowledge especially in the sensible aspect of the world, but he put particular stress on the fact that this aspect may give rise to evil in the human person because it is grasped in an exclusive manner through his senses. In itself the sensible aspect of the world is by no means evil but can become quite dangerous for the human person because the senses, before they are spiritually strengthened, can be easily inflamed by the sensible beauty of the world. Accordingly, it is better for the human person to concentrate his attention on the spiritual meanings of the world until he himself is strengthened in spirit.[161] The danger in concentrating the powers of sensation on the sensible aspect of things comes, according to St. Gregory of Nyssa, from the possibility that due to the human bodily kinship with animal nature, the passions will be brought to birth in him.[162] Hence, the sensible aspect of the world acquires its characterization as the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and through its encounter with the human powers of sensation, is mixed together with the sensible aspect of things, apart from any guidance by a mind moved by spirit. To this Satan, too, in the form of the serpent, symbol of all cunning insinuations, makes his contribution. "...and that fruit is combined of opposite qualities, which has the serpent to commend it, it may be for this reason that the evil is not exposed in its nakedness, itself appearing in its own proper nature..."[163] Evil would be ineffective if it did not deck itself in the colors of some good by which it lures those who are deceived into desiring it,

> but now the nature of evil is in a manner mixed, keeping destruction like some snare concealed in its depths and displaying some phantom of good in the deceitfulness of its exterior. The beauty of the substance [silver] seems good to those who love money: yet "the love of money is a root of all evil"... so, too, [with] the other sins... It speaks of it [the fruit]... not as a thing absolutely evil (because it is decked with good), nor as a thing purely good (because evil is latent in it)... [Thus] the serpent points out the evil fruit of sin, not showing the evil manifestly in its own nature (for man would not have been deceived by manifest evil), but giving to what the woman beheld the glamor of a certain beauty... he appeared to speak to her convincingly... "and she took of the fruit thereof and did eat," and that eating became the mother of death to men.[164]

Evil cannot captivate by itself but decks itself with flowers taken from the good. The human person preserves an indelible remnant of the good within himself and must deceive himself by thinking that the sin he is committing has some justification through good. In its inability to stand on its own, evil is ambiguous, hence the perversity – presenting evil as good – to which any tempter must resort if he is to persuade someone to commit the evil he puts forward. Certainly, one who allows himself to be deceived retains in his deception a certain amount of insincerity. He consents to being deceived and is aware that he is deceived. Yet even this need to deceive himself represents a minimum of good left in him like a flimsy bridge by which evil gets in. Without this, evil cannot enter into him.

Evil offers an initial sweetness or good but in the end shows its destructive effect. In regard to the beginning of evil, the devil has no great need of deceiving man, for evil captivates on its own. It is from the human being's fear of the end, that is, of the consequences of an evil deed, that the devil must calm the human soul. As long as the voice of God, which resounded in the depths of the woman's sincere conscience, was telling her: "If you eat from the tree, you shall die" (Gen 2:17), it set this fear over against the tempting whisper of the serpent who was deceiving her with the words: "Of course you will not die, but you will be like God" (Gen 3: 4-5). Afterwards, however, this reassurance regarding the end of her evil deed grew stronger in the display of its initial sweetness.

St. Basil the Great interpreted the good and the evil connected with the fruit of this tree in a different way. His interpretation opened up an optimistic perspective toward the future and completed rather than contradicted that of St. Gregory of Nyssa. For St. Basil, the good and the evil committed by Adam are to be seen in the fact that by eating from the tree, Adam committed an act of disobedience on the one hand, while on the other hand, he was led to the knowledge of his own nakedness and hence to the knowledge of shame. Thus – and here St. Basil's approach is the reverse of St. Gregory's – if the beginning is evil, the end is good; or rather, after the evil end, or as he comes to encounter evil, repentance is born in man. In Adam's case, it was through his eating that the idea came to him of making clothes for himself so as to curb his fleshly impulses. In general, the temptation of the serpent served to alert the first humans to the battle to protect themselves against his temptations and to the struggle necessary to vanquish Satan. It was God himself who placed in man this impulse to fight against Satan, and in the Son of Man, Christ, this impulse led to the breaking of Satan's power. In Christ the ultimate end of the battle is found. "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen 3:15). Even the beauty of the tree has served for the human person as an occasion to fight against temptations. By himself the human person will certainly not be able to conquer the evil that was introduced within him, but neither will the evil do away entirely with the good in the human person. The human person will remain in an ambivalent state. Emphasizing this struggle on behalf of the good in the human person and against the evil likewise present within him, St. Basil the Great said: "That is why there was planted a tree bearing beautiful fruits, so that by abstaining from its sweetness and displaying the good of abstinence, we might justly be deemed worthy of the crown of patience. For not only disobedience followed upon the eating, but also the knowledge of nakedness."[165]

According to the interpretations of the fathers, the knowledge of good and evil, acquired when the activity of the senses unites with the sensible aspect of the world, consists in a knowledge of the passions born in the human person, while according to the special interpretation of St. Basil, it consists also in the fight against these passions. From the patristic interpretations we see that on account of the Fall, the human person was left with the knowledge of evil in himself but overwhelmed by it. He continued to be opposed to evil but could not succeed in bringing his struggle to a victorious conclusion.

From the fact that the state of disobedience as estrangement from God is reciprocally involved with the passionate impulse that takes its birth from the weaving together of sensuality and the sensible aspect of the world, a more complex understanding of this sad knowledge of good and evil results, that is, of the fall of man.

Disobedience, pride, and our own selfish appetite arise as a weakening of the spirit. These, moreover, produce a restriction on the knowledge of God's creation; the human person looks to what he can dominate and to what can satisfy his bodily needs and pleasures, now become passions. The bodily passions, in turn, will feed the pride in the human person that satisfies them. His exclusively material needs and passions will be a source of pride justified by his proud claim to be autonomous.

We should note, that in our description of this restricted knowledge of creation, we have already passed on to the consenquences of sin, inasmuch as this restricted image of the world in a particular way, but in part, too, this restricted knowledge (which both hold sway within man against his will) are no longer produced by an actual sin.

This restricted knowledge is adapted to an understanding of the world as ultimate realilty, but as a reality characterized as object and destined to satisfy exclusively the bodily needs – now become passions – of rational creatures. It conforms to the human passions and pride under whose power it has fallen, and it sees creation as a vast, opaque, and ultimate object possessed of no transparence or mystery that transcends it. This knowledge took its origin from a spiritually undeveloped human person, and it has remained at his measure, arresting his spiritual growth in relation to the horizon that lies beyond the sensible world. It is a knowledge that veils what is most essential in creation, hence a knowledge in the ironic sense that God uses to speak of in Genesis 3:22. It is a knowledge that will never know the ultimate meaning and purpose of reality.

The difficulty of coming to know the transparent character of creation and of person itself, characters that open their infinite meanings, derives also from the fact that creation and the human person can no longer put a stop to the process of corruption that leads each human person toward death. Had Adam not sinned, the conscious creature would have advanced toward a kind of "stable" motion within a greater and greater convergence and unification of the parts of creation, of the human person in himself and of humans among themselves and with God, within a movement of universal love whereby creation is overwhelmed by the divine Spirit. Instead, through the Fall, a motion toward divergence and decomposition entered creation. It is only through Christ, as God incarnate, that the parts of creation have begun to recompose themselves so as to make possible its future transfiguration, for from Christ the unifying and eternally living Spirit is poured out over creation.

We note that in the Orthodox view, the world after the Fall did not take on a totally and fatally opaque image, nor was human knowledge wholly restricted to a knowledge that conformed to an opaque, untransparent image of the world. Humans can penetrate this opacity in part by means of another kind of knowledge, and indeed, they often manage to do this, but they cannot wholly overcome this opacity and the knowledge that conforms to it. These remain dominant structures.

We have seen, moreover, that the world has a meaning only because, being malleable, it can be led toward a mode of existence that is higher and eternal, toward the perfect truth or good that consists in love and union between God and the world, between humans and God, and among humans themselves, that is, only if the world is seen as a transparency that grows finer and finer to promote the relationship of total love between humans and God and among humans themselves.

Creation has been ordered in such a way that it might be a place where God can speak and work with this purpose in view and where we can respond to God through our words and deeds and set out on the path of this developing communion that God has willed. Creation fulfills its purpose when it continues to remain a place wherein our human being can undertake a dialogue of some sort with God. For this dialogue can grow only if the world continues to be seen, at least in part, as a gift of God, a foundation for the higher gift of salvation through which the world will be delivered from its present state of corruptibility and death.

The world was originally created with the qualities that correspond to this purpose. Through the Fall it became to a large extent opaque, and the withdrawal of the divine Spirit from the world weakened the character it had as transparent medium between God and humans and among humans themselves. Because the Spirit has withdrawn both from the world and from the human person, the world no longer keeps its original malleability, nor does the human person preserve that force of spirit whereby he can lead the world toward a state in which it serves fully as a means of communication between God and himself and between himself and his fellow humans. At every point within each causal series the world still allows for the choice of many causal directions, indeed even for the realization of certain effects which surpass the effects that lie within the power of natural causality. But the world no longer affords the possibility to make easy use of the whole of its malleable character, while among humans it is rare to find those who by their efforts acquire enough spiritual force from their link with the divine energy as to overcome natural causality itself and open up an exit from it and at the same time a prospect of the future dawning of the full meaning of existence and of the fullness of life, goodness, and genuine spirituality.

Yet, even through these rare breakthroughs to the higher horizon of integral good, we have the feeling that this kind of breakthrough could be achieved in a peremptory manner if only our spiritual powers were reunified and reinforced and if reason were always united with love. But in the insufficient union of reason and love in the weakening of each by their separation, and in the divergence between them, which permits no fully penetrating love, no full realization of good, we feel the presence of sin. In paradise Adam could see with a mind that was full of love, with a soul filled with the power of the divine Spirit, and this not only because he himself was completely unified, but also because he lived in a creation that was full of the divine Spirit. No separation existed between creation and the world of the divine energies, no contradiction among the tendencies of man, no separation between these and the higher divine powers. Adam had open before him the endless dimensions of these depths and was able with no difficulty to remain on the steps leading toward the good. Creation, opening up as it did on the infinite, protected him from being cornered in any way and did not seem a narrow, enclosed reality to the human person. Because it was associated with rationality, creation spread wide its dimensions to their fullest meaning, for human existence had not yet been cut back by death.

For those who raise themselves in Christ from this narrowness of creation, death does not have the last word. Existence is extended beyond death into the infinite. For them rationality acquires its full meaning, and so does existence. They see the assurance that they will continue eternally in virtue of the worth of their own person, which they feel. The eternal value of the human person is assured by the fact that the supreme basis itself of existence, as the human being's partner in eternal communion and love, is personal in character. The return of the human being to communion with God delivers him from eternal death.

By renouncing communion with God and with his fellow humans, the human being has limited his knowledge to knowledge of the world as object. He has grown weak in knowledge of the divine subject who is superior to the world, for knowledge of the divine subject comes about through communion with God and never gives man the possibililty of being sovereign over him. In wishing to know everything in a completely or merely rational manner, the human being is left with only that aspect of the world and of the human body that understands humans as objects. Left with a narrowly rational knowledge of nature and of his fellow humans, the human being has detached knowledge from the understanding of creation as the gift of God and from the love of God as the one who is continuously bestowing creation as gift, providing the human being with his neighbors as partners in a dialogue of love.

There can be no denying, however, that knowledge of the rationality of nature through the mediation of human reason represents in its own way a development of the human spirit. Thus, here, too, we have an ambiguity, a simultaneous growth and reduction of our powers symbolized by the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The exclusively rational knowledge of the world to which man has been reduced and which comes to him by separating, limiting, and generalizing does not provide him with knowledge of the whole of existence, nor does it obtain for him the spiritual life in its integrity, for it leaves the human being outside of communion with the supreme Subject and with his fellow humans as subjects. It leaves him bereft of eternal life and lacking in the prospects of knowing an eternally new reality, prospects assured by communion with the supreme Subject and with one's fellow subjects.

St. Gregory of Nyssa drew attention to the surprising fact that besides the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the "tree of life" was also to be found in the very midst of paradise.[166] This implies that both of them were found in the same central point, for there cannot be two central points. The meaning might be that one and the same world, when grasped exclusively by means of the senses and by reason placed at the service of the senses, is the source of the good that is not good; whereas, when grasped in its real significance by a reason that sees more deeply and instead places the senses in its own service, it becomes a source of life. Therefore, the "tree of life" is either the same world grasped by "mind," or else God who comes to be seen through the world grasped in this way. A "tree of life" is the person of anyone else who is the source of my life through the love he shows to me, while the "Tree of life" all-inclusively and *par excellence* is the absolute Person as the source of endless love for all and the source of the love all persons have among themselves.

In this case a question would arise: in what sense does Genesis say that God drove Adam and Eve out of paradise after the Fall so that they would not eat from the "tree of life" and live? How could they still eat of the world through "mind" and live, once fallen away from this capacity? Did not the world cease to be a "tree of life" through the very fall of man? Or was the "tree of life" not hidden away by the Fall in the depth of the world? Perhaps that is exactly what Genesis means, even though it attributes this result to a special act of God. Adam and Eve had fallen from the vision of God into a world that had become untransparent and because God had withdrawn from their sight. God does not behave passively when confronted by their fall; they are driven away from the tree of life by a separate act withdrawing this tree from the possibility that they might see it. The world becomes untransparent and brings forth death and corruption not because of the human deed alone, but also because of the act of God who withdraws some of his energies from the world. The fact that the tree of life is said to have remained somewhere from which humans have been removed may mean that in itself the world remained potentially a tree of life and potentially transparent, but that men had fallen away from knowing it in this way. They no longer saw the world as a "garden," as a paradise of the fullness of life through which God was "walking"; they no longer saw the world in its meaning as open to the personal infinity of God. It is significant that the saints who, through Christ, have raised themselves above the exclusive attachment to creation see in creation features and dimensions hidden from those who know only the world. St. Symeon the New Theologian, for example, described the order of eternal life, which he saw in part even in this life, in colors of unutterable beauty and harmony. We can say that it is precisely those who cling exclusively to the surface of creation who lose the vision of its profundity in God, who lose the world as tree of life and as chalice inviting us to take the immortal divine life. These are the people who stand outside the world as the "garden" through which God is walking and who go on living in a world that brings forth "thorns and thistles" alongside the wheat, a world of sweat and exertions, a world of pleasures mixed with pain. According to the Christian faith, the sinners in hell exist in the darkness that lies outside the real world. We see how envious people make ugly the images of human persons and the things that belong to them. They are blind to the light that is coming to them from another plane. The dimension of person that opens out on the infinite and the quality in created things that makes them transparent of their ultimate personal cause remain hidden from such people. The great example of envy, Satan, cannot put up with the world as the beautiful and ordered work of God and brings to it only disorder, while he himself has become the image of the most extreme ugliness. It is not only humans he hates, but the world as a whole. His aim is to hinder humans from seeing its beauty, and he seeks to reduce the world to being merely an object of the lower appetites and a cause of wrangling. To this image of the world Satan lures human beings, too, so that they might forget God and the depths of spirituality and goodness.

Those who do not allow themselves to be tempted by Satan finally come to discover the greatness and the real beauty of creation, together with their discovery of the divine Spirit who has returned to them and to the world. In hell, the absence of life in God means also that normality is absent from the world, which is transformed into a mass of hallucinatory shadows cast up by the movements of chaos. It is like being thrown into a nightmare, into the pseudo-reality of the ego cut off from those consistent depths of the world where it serves to make transparent the fullness of divine life. In paradise all things were beautiful because they were gestures in concrete form of God's endless love and were perceived by Adam and Eve through love. Afterwards ugly, poisonous, and monotonous features appear in existence or else the sinner makes them to be such. Creation in general loses its image of being the good unmixed with evil, with its depths open to infinite knowledge, and instead brings to light, through the agency of the sinner, an image mingled with sufferings, many failures, and incompleteness. Christianity links decrease of spiritual life, or the death of the soul, and consequently sickness, corruption, and physical death also to sin and separation from the Spirit of God. Because of sin, or because the divine Spirit has withdrawn from it, creation grows weak in its vital resources. In the state of sin our very being can advance to such a condition of self-centeredness that it almost no longer knows whether creation really exists. Eternal death is the rendering of this state permanent in hell, and it follows upon death as the separation of the soul from the body that decomposes.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE GOOD AND HUMAN COMMUNION

Having made his choice for reasons of pride, in favour of the self-centered and rationalist knowledge of reality as object, Adam then applied this knowledge to the matter of the good. But the good and even existence outside communion with the divine subject and with human subjects has a doubtful character, and therefore, knowledge of it is also doubtful. The effect of this is to plunge our being into an immense sadness. Fallen in his pride, Adam wanted to decide on his own what is the good and what exists. Thus, existence and the good are reduced to the state of being objects that might fit the limits imposed by the shrivelled and haughty reason of an isolated individual. They are accommodated to fleeting and strictly selfish interests and pleasures. Neither genuine existence, nor the good, are known or experienced fully, however, except in loving relationship with other subjects. You must listen respectfully to the other also if you seek to discover other points of view and come to know his never-ending newness. You must listen to him if you wish to see what he also expects of you and come to know more than just his existence as something different from that of the world, but also what is the good that he is looking for from you. Indeed, the good he looks for from you, and you from him, lies precisely in this: that each of you is for the other a source of newness, communion, and love. The evil is no longer evil when the other communicates with you and you with him. It is a good thing to be with the other "for better and for worse." In communion evil is overcome, for communion is a fulfillment of being. Moreover, the good is no longer good when you impose it on the other even though you do not love him and keep yourself away from communion with him. Strictly speaking, he needs your love and you need his. Through your love you give him everything and he gives you everything. In the need he has for your love you verify your own genuine existence, and in the need you have for his love, you verify that he exists in a mode superior to that of objects; you find that he fulfills you, and in this way you experience the good. Through this, however, you find that you exist by reinforcing the other in his existence just as he exists by reinforcing you in your existence. Love means, moreover, remaining in communion.

This is also the true good for each partner in communion. A good that is experienced in individual isolation does not exist, or is not something that lasts. The good is response of the other to your need for love and your response to his need.

The good is the continuous exercise of man's responsibility toward his fellow humans within a concrete relationship, and it results from genuine knowledge, while genuine knowledge is knowledge in communion. True reason is at one and the same time word, sharing, and participation in reality, and the highest kind of participation is personal. Solipsistic reason is a mere fragment of reason and quickly becomes the tool of all sophistries behind our selfish impulses and the means of justifying every evil.

Christian faith says that if I take my orientation from my reason only when I am deciding what is good for the other and for myself, then I am using my reason arrogantly and selfishly and am departing from both the true and the good. In such a case I do not reinforce my existence from my communion with the other, and this kind of decision can never bring about any good either for me or for the other; my existence cannot increase from that of the other, nor his existence from mine. Only love, or communion in freedom is the source of good. Love alone can reinforce the existence of the two in common and only the decision that has its origin in love and its goal in love – or is taken in common on the basis of and for the sake of reciprocal love – serves what is genuinely good. The isolated decision made according to a rational norm established by the individual cannot do this.

Christian doctrine teaches that only the one who serves is saved. If I want to serve my good and that of the other through reason, I cannot do it by my reason only. I must consult his reason also, for each one sets out from different concrete circumstances and needs, and in any case, the ultimate good is brought to light through dialogue with the other. I must not submit the good to self-centered reason, but on the contrary, I must submit self-centered reason to the good, or to the higher reason found in the communion that grows from love. I must submit reason to love.

It emerges from Genesis, however, that by tasting the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the human being wanted to know only a good and an evil of his own in relation to nature, a nature toward which he feels no duty or responsibility. The human being feels responsibility only towards persons, and the good consists not in profiting from nature as object, but in meeting his responsibility or his duties toward humans and in making use of nature to this end.

A good conceived only as individual profit from nature is a good of a lower kind, fleshly and egoistic; it is not a genuine good even for the one who conceives of it in this way, for it does not develop the individual in the direction of his personal humanity.

The good is brought about only through exercise of a responsibility, or from fulfillment of certain duties in respect to other persons who have need of my help for their own development, just as I have need of their help. The good is what ought to be done, not simply what is. Hence it is something distinct from the rationality of nature considered only in respect of what it actually is, rather than in respect of what that rationality seeks to become through the agency of humans so that it might lead humans beyond itself and beyond each one among them. The good consists in loving the other as yourself.

Through the mediation of nature in deeds done by some on behalf of others, the good comes to be seen. The fruits of nature must be transformed and given to others too, not simply made use of in selfish fashion. That is why, after the Fall God gave humans the ascesis of work as a means of healing. To this was added the cross of suffering, which renders the joy of sensible things spiritual to an even greater extent. It is in pain that women receive the gift of children.

The good comes to be known only in loving dialogue with other persons, in the curbing of selfishness and pride. A good that I, following my own reason, would impose on others would have no transforming power at all. It is certainly true that the good will impose itself nevertheless, but this happens in a different way: by radiating outwards as a power made real in a subject who has himself become good, or by manifesting itself as the love of that subject for other persons. The good shines forth most conspicuously and uninterruptedly from that supreme Personal reality identified with the supreme good from all eternity.

Only from the good that shines forth from this supreme Personal reality and is reflected in human persons do the latter feel encouraged in their interior impulse to bring about the good among themselves by means of an ever more developed communion.

The good is a necessity of human nature, and its concrete form is laid down and lived by human persons in their everyday relationships and also in function of the way they relate to that unconditioned imperative that impresses itself because it is the good – eternally existent and continually communicated – of the supreme Person. That is why the commandment of love is given by Christ and associated with the love of God. In this fashion the human person's likeness to God comes about. The imperative of the good cannot be imposed by a nature, only by a supreme Personal reality precisely in virtue of the fact that in relations with us that very reality is unceasingly manifested as good without any diminution. I accept this imperative only because it is a call to love and as a response to that love.

If we do not feel this imperative of the good acutely, we have no power to bring about our growth in the good. No one succeeds in imposing the good in his relations with others, except by dominating his own lower impulses of a violently egoistic character. When he refuses the position of obedient and responsive subject in dialogue with the God who does good to all and seeks to have the good fulfilled by all humans among themselves, the conscious creature has weakened his position as a responsible being in respect to his fellow humans also and affirmed his own lower and non-dialogical selfish impulses.

Even from the time of paradise, the conscious creature refused the genuine reality of the good as positive response to the request of the one who does all good, or simply as a response to the request of those who need his love. He thus chose the false good of selfish pleasure wrung from nature, and from the outset rejected dialogue or communion as the true good in favour of that false good, which is a fruit of exploiting the object for purely selfish interests. The criterion for appreciating the good was no longer to be for him the other's request for his love, and above all else the request of the one who himself does all that is good, but selfish appetite instead. This gives a rational basis to an irrational tendency and makes self-centered use of reason in order to justify selfish appetites. The conscious creature has thus perverted reason and become a sophist.

Inasmuch as each individual has placed his reason and his work in the service of egoism, reason has advanced the cause of struggle and division rather than that of harmony. Each one has wished to command the others in order to make them subject to his own will. Everyone has become spiritually impoverished because he no longer wants to listen to the views of others, to know them truly, to open up to them, or to be enriched spiritually by them, for each wanted to grow rich only from the corporal and forced exploitation of others, not from the freely offered generosity of their love. From wanting to make use of sensible nature without having to work, man has progressed to wanting to enjoy the fruits of nature through the work of others.

The impoverishment of the spirit has brought about its weakness and death, and the consequences of this were the corruption of nature and physical death. Unaccustomed to seeing others as free and loving subjects (for these had now become opaque for man and no longer transparent of the spiritual horizons of existence), and not understanding or respecting any more the infinitely higher worth of the human subject in comparison with objects, man no longer even perceived the subjective character attaching to the foundation of reality as a whole, and this, too, he brought down to the debased level of a substance, a law, an object at the disposition of his self-centered and aggressive knowledge. Reduced in this way to his own self as central reality in the midst of a world deaf and dumb, unfree, and unconscious, the conscious creature could no longer understand even himself apart from his blind impulse toward biological satisfactions and began to look upon the spirit within himself as a curiosity, something disruptive of life and contrary to nature, an unnatural excrescence he did not have to take much into account.

Having largely abandoned plain dialogue with God, the conscious creature has lost the opportunity of knowing the world in its sense as word of God. He has thereby also lost the opportunity of knowing both God's endless and deifying words in their relation to the word that serves as the basis of creation and those still higher meanings that flower abundantly upon the world's fabric of meanings.

Christian teaching mantains that through the fall into sin, creation has changed from being a transparent means of love between humans and God into what is now a largely opaque wall separating humans from one another, and all humans together from God. Creation is thus a cause not just of union among humans, but also of separation and dissension. The earth was defiled by the sin of Adam and his descendents, sometimes to the point of being stained with the blood of crimes and wars caused by their selfishness, greed, and envy. Through scorn and lack of love, some distorted and disguised their own image for others. A Romanian legend says that in the beginning the earth was transparent, but Cain strove to cover it over so that the corpse of his brother Abel could no longer be seen in it. We can add that the human person, too, was transparent to his neighbor, like a real brother; and to the extremely sensitive conscience of Adam, God, too, was transparent. But the earth, because it has been coveted in an almost exclusive way, has covered over brother to brother, and God to the conscience. In many cases, the body, uncontrolled in its greed for the things of the senses, has covered over the soul, while the soul, possessed by the selfish lower passions, has lost the sensitivity of conscience and with it its own transparency for God and the rest of humans. Frequently the individual who is dominated by shameful impulses has sought to hide his interior condition from the eyes of God and his fellow humans. Adam and Eve tried to hide from the face of God and thought they could make themselves invisible to God. But God saw them and reached them with his voice. In other words, they stripped themselves of the glorious garment of innocence and saw their nakedness, which they clumsily tried to cover. The human being cannot lose the character he has as a responsible being, even if he often avoids the true response.

Adam's wish to hide from the face of God and escape from communion with him cannot be completely realized, but to a certain extent, it has taken away the transparency that creation and our own being had for God and for that fullness of the riches and love that are possible among humans. In this way the human being has often attained a tormenting solitude like that of Cain. Among humans, sin has introduced egoism, appetite for unnessential things, spiritual weakness, spiritual death, followed by bodily death and everlasting death. It has led to and fostered the obscuring of the most essential and beautiful dimensions of existence: the dimension of the infinite spirit and of endless perfection within it; the dimension of the unutterable beauty proper to one's fellow human beings as subjects from whom love is always springing up pure and refreshed; and the dimension of the integral good that is easy to realize. Consequently, the integral sense of existence has become hard to discover and lends itself to countless divergent opinions that give rise to warfare among humans. The sure horizon that the enduring value and existence of the human person represented has been covered over with shadow.

Obviously, neither the good, nor the light, nor the connection to the source of enduring life have disappeared totally from creation's existence. The light has continued to shine in the darkness; the good continues to claim its rights before the conscience of men. Nor has the good given up the fight against evil. Goodness, friendship, noble aspirations, the hope for the immortality of the person – all these have remained like the rays of a sun that can never be totally covered over by the fleeting and ultimately rather insubstantial clouds of evil.

Before Christ came, however, sin prevented us from attaining to or remaining in full communion with God and our fellow men. It placed obstacles in the path of any integral accomplishment of the noble aspirations that were implanted into our being. But the "image of God" in us was only overshadowed and weakened, not totally erased. And the torment of our being comes precisely from this: that we cannot be reconciled with these lower satisfactions, with evil, and with the prospect of everlasting death. For our very being continues to be dissatisfied in its conscience and to suffer because its thirst for communion with God has not been fulfilled, and it has fallen far from its condition of being completely in the image of God. Our being is not reconciled with this "minus," this negative experience of what it actually is. For this reason it searches for the "plus," the positive, but in a way that only serves to increase the "minus" or negative. It seeks to avoid death through all sorts of immanent achievements, which are quite incapable of lasting eternally. In particular, they cannot deliver man from death.

When once nature is degraded to being simply a means of satisfying bodily needs, it brings all kinds of difficulties. "In fact, not being content with the mission of being a priest who offered nature to God, but, by the intention of becoming god, cutting off the aspiration of creation toward the Creator, it was natural that man should find in it a multitude of pleasures; but it was just as natural that nature should take its revenge. By not recognizing in us the image of the Creator, creation has become our enemy, and by its own revolt, it refuses to give us food and reveal its mysteries"[167] easily in all their depth.

This state of suffering and death need not be considered a punishment imposed on us forever by God. Because God is love, he always operates as love, and even through these difficulties he is leading us to repentance.

In general, the tragic state of the world after the Fall is not the result of any act of God, but exclusively the result of Adam's deed. In no way, therefore, is this state of suffering and death to be deemed a punishment imposed by God upon Adam. God as love is always acting with love, and love creates no evil whatsoever. Adam's slavery is the natural consequence of his being vanquished; his suffering is the physiological result of the trauma he himself sustained when he turned aside from his path, and death follows upon alienation from God. To regard God as the cause of suffering and death is an essential error, a real affront offered to him. Soteriologically, it is also genuinely heretical, for it strips the cross of Christ of its real historical and anthropological content – which is that of victory over Satan – and makes it a simple instrument of suffering and of the placating of God's "wrath."[168]

Neither corruptibility nor death, therefore, are punishments from God; they are instead consequences of our alienation from the source of life. They are not meant to last forever, but God changes their role so that they become means of healing evil. If this change had not been made, the punishment for sin would be eternal. The Greek theologian Panaghiotis Nellas, following Nicholas Cabasilas, wrote:

> Once death appeared in history, God, by keeping to himself all initiative, used it as He Himself had wanted and, by this changed use, He radically changed its nature. Allowing man to be clothed in biological life – the tunics of skin – as a result of sin, He has turned death, also the result of sin, against biological life. And thus by death not man is destroyed, but the corruption that enwraps him. Natural death destroys "the imprisonment of life in corruption"... God, the lover of man, by allowing death, turns it against corruption and its cause, which is sin. Death is permitted by God "so evil may not be without death," say the holy Fathers. This is why we do not fear death.[169]

The suffering produced by sin is also transformed into a means of opposing sin.

To what Nellas has said in regard to this transformation of the purpose of suffering and death, we should like to add, however, a further explanation, which shows that God does not effect this transformation in an external manner. This also explains the fact that suffering and death, the effects of sin, become means opposed to sin not only because they put an end to the endless repetition of sin, but also because they become a passage toward the true life. How is this to be explained? By the fact that the spirit grows strong through bearing suffering and death. On the other hand, our being endures suffering because it knows that by taking its stand in this way against pleasure it emerges from self-centeredness and opens itself to God; it endures death because it knows that death is not the ultimate reality. Therefore, suffering and death surpass corruption and death in a positive sense inasmuch as they are borne with faith in God. Understood in this way, they are also a sacrifice offered to God when borne with faith in him and without murmur. In Christ alone, however, has death entirely fulfilled its part in overcoming death. By taking his stand against pleasure when he accepts suffering and death, man overcomes both pleasure and suffering. But he does not oppose any and every satisfaction of bodily needs or of those blameless affections that entered human nature through sin. These are necessary to sustain life, and they also afford occasions for the human being to be constantly exerting himself so as to prevent their satisfaction beyond what is strictly necessary. The human being must remain the guardian of a boundary. For there he encounters God. The sad state our being attained through sin is due to the Fall from its ontological-dialogic relationship with God. St. Gregory of Nyssa said: "Corruption and decomposition are truly the falling away from Him Who truly exists. For how can one exist if one is not in the existent-One, or remain in existence if one does not believe that the existent-One is? And he who truly is, is certainly God, as the vision of the theophany testified to the great Moses. Hence, he who casts out the existence of God from his thought by saying that he does not exist has destroyed his own existence, having come to be outside the existent-One."[170]

The weakening of the human person's capacity to come to know the personal God through the agency of a transperent world and to live in communion with him and with his fellow humans has meant not only that God's grace has been withdrawn but also that the image of God in man has been weakened. Yet, this image in the human being has not been destroyed totally. The human being has a yearning for infinite knowledge wherein the thirst for God is hidden, and at times he even catches a glimpse of that knowledge. Similarly, the human person's need for the good has not been totally erased within him, although he does not always conceive this good as communion. Even communion with humans has continued, though in a feeble form.

Seven

PROVIDENCE AND THE DEIFICATION OF THE WORLD

The subject of God's plan for the deification of humankind and the world has been treated already in the first volume.[171] Here we wish only to show where this plan lies within the framework of divine providence and to stress the fact that providence and the plan for deifying creation and the human being are not thwarted by the introduction of sin into the world, but that the effect of sin has even been that providence takes the conditions of mankind's sinful state into account, while the plan for deification also includes within it the redemption of humankind.

Even in the state of sin, it is providence that preserves and directs the world. This means that the world is not compromised nor will ever be brought to utter destruction by the force of evil but keeps its worth in the eyes of God. Moreover, it is possible for the world to be preserved by God in a state such that it can guide humankind toward salvation and deification. Indeed, humans are being guided toward this goal.

Inasmuch as evil is not a factor that operates always in the same fashion in order to keep the world steadily within that weakened state that was introduced within it, so neither is the providence that preserves the world merely a constant countervailing action that keeps the world going with all its enduring erosion. Through the ever new initiatives of the evil spirits and of humans influenced by them, evil strives to maintain itself in new forms in the world and stamp itself deeper and deeper upon the world in the hope of destroying it completely. Providence, too, however, is always new in the ways it adapts to preserve and protect the world, making use of both its own forces and the good deeds of humans, whether these latter are supporting the good invariably or only intermittently. Through the multiplication of human beings as factors of good and evil, always original but endowed with memory of the past, God is leading the world toward ever new phases.

Thus, even through a providence whose main task is preservation, the world is being led forward. In other words, it is hard to distinguish between the providence that acts to preserve and the providence that acts to lead.

This dynamic sense of the providence that preserves is activated more intensely in the sphere proper to the history of conscious human beings and their development. Providence helps the forces of good not only to maintain themselves – and consequently humankind too – in the same forms, but also to obstruct and thwart evil's own new forms of action.

Thus, a balance is maintained between the forces of good and evil, which at the same time accords with progress in conscious beings. Yet laziness in development on the part of good would not itself constitute a good, just as simple continuance in imperfection itself represents an evil. Nevertheless, after the fall into sin, progress in the good occurs through the struggle against evil, and sometimes this very struggle, through the ambiguity that belongs to it, leads to ideas and impulses which, up to a point, are good in themselves. Moreover, in this guise they do more than just provoke opposition to the good; they also force those who serve the good to make their own the task of giving effect with sincerity and greater thoroughness to those ideas and impulses belonging to the forces of evil that are incompletely or only apparently good. In fact, no conscious being can withdraw completely from the force of the good. Thus, God makes use both of the evil and the good forces as he leads history toward higher stages and ultimately toward salvation and deification, for providence implies synergy between God and the conscious creature.

More can be said: this leading forward of the world, understood as the work of providence, which is being accomplished in collaboration with the world, cannot be separated off wholly from a certain creative and progressive activity on the part of God, although this differs from creation as such, since it uses the foundation that has been laid through the act of creation. For example, it is also through synergic providence that God brings matter up to that phase in which the human being can be created and given his place in the world. The very act of bringing of more and more humans into existence is itself a further creative work of God and goes beyond merely guiding the world toward the goal of perfection in communion with him.

Supernatural revelation, which is comprised not only of a teaching that comes from God, but also in acts, leads to levels in the raising up of the human person that are essentially new and transcend those of nature. This action of opening certain essentially new levels and of leading humankind toward them also enters into the framework of providence, which is identified here with the plan of salvation and deification of the world. For in the absence of these new levels, and if creation were not being led toward them and raised up to them, there would be no meaning to a providence that both preserves and takes leadership.

Christian teaching holds that divine providence plays a large role in the progress of history through the agency of these new levels that God opens up to the conscious creature, as also by his leading creation toward them and raising it up to reach them. Plainly in this action, too, God does not work alone, but in collaboration with human action. Through supernatural revelation, however, God's initiative and his role become conspicuous in a way that is beyond any doubt.

This action casts into high relief the fact that God is not a God who merely preserves the world in certain essentially cyclic forms, but a God whose world has been called to the perfection of life in union with him. He is not the God who makes the existing form of the world eternal; rather, he is God of a world that he guides and moves toward the goal of perfection in him. God has indeed been at work in acts of the past, but these acts moved the world forward. That is why we must believe that he is also at work now in modes adequate to our own time and that he will be at work in the time to come as well, so as to disclose himself completely in the eschatological future.

A good part of more recent theology puts the idea of hope in the forefront. "Any idea of God that cements the existing social order is abandoned. Today it makes sense to speak about God only if he opens a future and has a function of transforming the world."[172] That is, only if, as God leads the human being toward himself and toward salvation, he is leading him to higher levels.

This work of God is bound up *par excellence* with the category of the "new": "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev 21:5). This is the final perspective opened for us by God. But in the view of this final newness, humans must become new from now onwards (Eph 4:24; 2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15). Not at the end alone will all things be made new; it is true from the first coming of Christ (2 Cor 5:17). And this newness is not one that grows old, but one in which we must unceasingly be walking and growing: "[so that] ... we too might walk in newness of life... so that we might serve not under the old written code but in the newness of spirit" (Rom 6:4, 7:6). To walk in "newness of life" or "newness of spirit" means to be always open to "the new." For the "spirit" is always alive, that is, spirit does not remain within the same things. This is that "stability" within the movement of ascent described by St. Gregory of

Nyssa, a stability that is simultaneously motion and without which the human being no longer remains within continuous newness but as a consequence, falls.[173] Moreover, God is life. St. Gregory of Nyssa said: "True being is true life... It is not in the nature of what is not life to be the cause of life [... the true sight of God consists in this, that the one who looks up to God never ceases in that desire ...] This truly is the vision of God: never to be satisfied in the desire to see him."[174]

St. Paul the apostle opposed the "newness of spirit" to the oldness of the letter or the law as he opposed the life of the resurrection to abiding in death. Now where the law is, there is found a sign that sin reigns. "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law" said St. Paul (1 Cor 15:56). When the law does not prepare men to go beyond the level it has helped them to attain, that is, when man does not draw the conclusion as a kind of constant newness, that Christ is "the end of the law" or that "love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom 10:4, 13: 10), then the law is the power of sin that leads to death. Moreover, sin is the sign of the survival of the old man. To remain always within the identical forms is an expression of the survival of sin, of staying within the limits of the self. The genuinely "new" does not represent growth in self-centeredness, but rather continual surpassing of the self, advancement beyond the self; it is not the extension of one's own dominion in order to provide even greater security for the ego.

The law is repetition, according to an external norm, within the monotonously confined horizon of egoism and death. To walk in "newness of life" means to live beyond repetition as love or knowledge or the good passes by degrees from one stage to another, from *epektasis* to *epektasis*, as St. Gregory of Nyssa put it.[175] God makes any state already attained, any result already achieved, a relative thing only. Every such state only represents a step leading to another and higher one. The "reign of freedom" transcends any level that is attainable, and it is toward such liberty that we are advancing, always unhindered by any level we might have reached already.

God reveals himself in this way as the factor that forms a humanity that is being raised higher and higher, and as the force that is leading us toward a future that is never closed back in on itself. This factor shows itself in the form of a love for humans that is continuously bestowing more upon them and wanting them to be more and more loving toward one another. Thus, love for God, or more strictly, thought taken for God, represents a continuous contribution toward keeping the world in movement toward more and more authentically human relations among humans. God resists making any structure or condition humans have achieved among themselves into an absolute reality. He shows his effectiveness in two ways: first, by keeping the human person's spiritual horizon free when it is confronted with any degree or form of this kind of absolute structure or relationship; second, by bestowing upon our nature the impulse to find paths that lead toward ever more improved relations among humans and to the goal of a humanity elevated to the highest possible degree, a degree that cannot be defined beforehand. St. Maximus the Confessor expressed this vision through evaluating movement in time in a positive manner, that is, as movement toward the ultimate goal of rest in loving union with God who has no limits and who, at the same time, is not identical with our own "I." "For necessarily the free movement of all things in desire around anything else will cease when the ultimate goal, which is wished and participated in, appears, the goal that will fill to overflowing, so to speak, those who will participate in it according to their capacity. For it is toward it that every way of life and every thought of what is elevated tends and in it all desire rests and is by no means carried beyond it."[176]

But this ascent toward God and our own perfect state, fully realized, would be impossible without a foretaste, even in this life, of the experience of God and of our perfect, authentic life in God. One part of Catholic theology that, in the past was wholly credulous toward the abstract definitions of scholasticism and incredulous towards any assertion that there could be an experience of God even in this earthly life, has today also come to affirm such an anticipated experience of God. Some of its representatives, however, see this as possible only in the loving relationship between the "I" and the "Thou." Certain representatives of Protestant theology hold the same views and wish to replace the name of God with the term "co-humanity" (Mitmenschlichkeit). In both these theologies a strong influence from existentialist philosophy is discernible. Invoking Jean Paul Sartre, the Catholic theologian Gotthold Hasenhüttl says:

> Within human existence there occurs for the first time an absolute experience that cannot be qualitatively surpassed. We have this experience not with our own existence, but primarily through a "Thou" whom we encounter. Psychology and philosophy know that the human person comes to the illumination of self and the experience of self as other through a "Thou." The personal "Thou" brings myself as a person before me and I receive myself as a person from the person of the other as gift. The relation to the "Thou" is constitutive for the human person and it represents the fundamental social human relationship. In the relation between persons the presence of the one who is momentarily other determines whether it will be humanized or pushed into inhuman situations... That is why the human "Thou" is the condition of a possible experience of God... This is only the case if "Thou" encounters [us] in love... In the love of our neighbor there is revealed an ultimate depth that makes the meaningful use of the word God possible... As a relation that establishes communion, love is however an ultimate reality, a unity that cannot be dissolved into its own motives... Love needs no grounding within any third element, within a reality foreign to it... If man wanted to explain God as the foundation of love, then love would be disturbed, even destroyed.[177]

Hasenhüttl concludes these equivocal affirmations with the even more equivocal conclusion that man produces existence and is conditioned by it. "Both determining elements of the relation (man/existence) are in a state of becoming, and they limit each other reciprocally."[178]

We do not deny that the "I-Thou" relation constitutes a locus for the experience of God. Nor do we contest the fact that the human person cannot experience himself fully except in relation with another human person or that this experience is most marked in loving relationship with the other. But over and above this we add: the human being cannot exist apart from his relationship with nature. The three together make an inseparable whole: *I-Thou-Nature*. Given reality, however, within this framework as an ontological datum, the human being can experience God both in himself and in relation to nature.

On the other hand, the love between "I" and "Thou" is love between subjects. But love does not lie exclusively within the power of these two subjects, for then the love between them could be something permanent and perfected on its own. In other respects, love is nourished and rekindled in its moments of weakness and interruption by responsibility to a supreme subject who gives power to love and leads the love between human persons toward perfection. The supreme subject deepens in our eyes the value and mystery of the other person and thereby strengthens our own love for that person and vice versa. In this the love of the supreme Person for the person of my fellow human being is made evident to me, while the love of the supreme Personal reality for me is made evident to his person.

The experience of the "I-Thou" relation is perfect only in the experience which everyone has of the other as a subject who cannot be diminished. But no human being can overcome the tendency in himself to reuse the other, after the warmth of their first encounter has cooled, to the state in which he is an object, more or less. Only holy "fear" of supreme Person helps me continuously rekindle my experience of the other as subject and as one toward whom I have an unlimited responsibility; only such a fear hinders me from neglecting him or from seeking to take advantage of him.

Through the absolute value he has accorded human persons out of love for them as their creator and savior, God, that is, the supreme Personal reality, guides their mutual love to become something more and more uninterrupted and sublime.

We experience God through our fellow humans and in the love we have for them, or we test our experience of him by means of the fully responsible love we have for them, but we do not identify him with them, do not identify him with our love for one another. Rather, we recognize him as a source of supreme personal love who gives us the strength to rise higher and higher in our love for one another.

This also has the effect of making possible both my prayer to God and our common prayer to him. If God were simply identical with the love between the two of us, prayer would be of no avail. That may be why some groups of Protestant theological students have at times refused to take part in prayer in their churches.

To these reflections we must add the following remarks: freedom in the face of the established order, which represents a level already achieved, does not at the same time mean freedom in the face of an order that keeps the prospect open for a continuous progress in the infinite love of God and neighbor. That kind of freedom might also be a freedom that does not advance upward in the love of God and of neighbor, but is only a pretext for passing from one passion to another. It can mean a mere change of master rather than the acquisition of true freedom. About such freedom, used as a cloak for the passions, St. Peter the apostle said: "Live as free men, yet without using your freedom as a pretext for evil; but live as servants of God" (1 Pet 2:16). It is only by the service through love of the God who loves us and by service of our neighbor out of responsibility toward him that we grow in our freedom, for we grow in communion with the one who respects our freedom. We come to understand this because we observe that the freedom of each person grows only within the loving and respectful relationship of reciprocal service between persons. Of those who invite us to the false freedom that is the slave of pride and the passions, the same apostle warned: "For, uttering loud boasts of folly, they entice with licentious passions of the flesh men who have barely escaped from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption; for whatever overcomes a man, to that he is enslaved" (2 Pet 2:18-19). Not even love of our neighbor makes us free, except in God.

We are not borne away to that ocean of love and freedom that is found in God, either on the unbounded slough of licentiousness or on the lake of fixed understanding where the water is held in its movement by the shores, but only on the river that flows continuously onward (and upward) between the very banks that safeguard its flow. With its dogmas that open out on the infinite and its services that purify the passions and nourish prayer, the spirituality of the Christian East constitutes the best method for those who seek to achieve true freedom in God and to progress in the knowledge and the communion of God and neighbor through experience. The spirituality of the Christian East represents the method by which advancement in the direction willed by God's providence is best assured, the providence that has reached its most sublime activity in Christ. For in Christ the providence of God is revealed as a plan and a real activity for the salvation and deification of creation in him.

ABBREVIATIONS

ET	English Translation
FC	Fathers of the Church, NY/Washington, 1947-
LCC	The Library of Christian Classics, London/Philadelphia, 1953-1966
NPNF	The Nicene and Post-Nicene Christian Fathers, NY/Oxford, 1887-1902
PG	Patrologia Greaca, Paris, 1857-1866
PL	Patrologia Latina, Paris, 1844-1864
SChr	Sources Chretiennes, Paris, 1956-

NOTES

CHAPTER ONE

[1] Paul Abrecht/Peter Scherhans eds., "A Theological Critique of Scientific Rationality. Report of an Ecumenical Working Party," in Anticipation Nr. 16, March 1974, pp. 2-7 at pp. 6-7 [=subsection "Nature, Social Justice and the Eschatological Future"], a report of the Consultation on Science and Technology sponsored by the sub-unit on "Church and Society" of the World Council of Churches.

[2] Maximus the Confessor, *The Ambigua*, PG 91.1072B-C.

[3] This theme has been developed at length in Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1994), 150-171.

[4] Plato, Parmenides 156 d-e: "...but this instant [ἡ ἐξαίφνης αὕτη], a strange nature, is something inserted between motion and rest, and it is in no time at all; but into it and from it what is moved changes to being at rest, and what is at rest to being moved." ET = R. E. Allen, *Plato's Parmenides* (Minneapolis, 1983), 43.

[5] Olivier Clément, "Notes sur le temps (II)," in *Messager de l'Exarchat du Patriarche russe en Europe Occidentale* 7 (1957) Nr. 27, pp. 133-134.

[6] *Homilies on the Hexaemeron* 1.6, PG 29.16C- 17A; ET = B. Jackson, *NPNF* 2nd Series, vol. 8, p. 55 [altered].

[7] *Homilies on the Hexaemeron* 1.2, PG 29.8C; ET = Jackson, 53 [emphasis added].

[8] *Homilies on the Hexaemeron* 1.4, PG 29.12C; ET = Jackson, 54.

[9] The allusiveness of the Romanian text here cannot be reproduced in English: "the soul (*suflet*) is breathed (*suflat*) from God." [trans. note.]

[10] *The Ambigua*, PG 91.1164A-C,1153A-C.

[11] Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, (Crestwood NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1978), 62.

[12] *The Incarnation of the Word* 2.3.18 – 2.4.29, *Athanase d'Alexandrie. Sur l'Incarnation du Verbe*, ed. C. Kannengiesser, *SChr* 199, Paris 11 pp 264/266; ET = A. Robertson, *NPNF* 2nd Series, vol. 4, 37.

[13] Patrick McLaughlin, *The Church and Modern Science*, Dublin/London 1957, 33, citing the address of Pius XII to the Pontifical Academy of Science, February 8, 1948.

[14] *Great Catechetical Oration* 5, PG 45.21B-C; ET = W. Moore/H. A. Wilson, *NPNF* 2nd Series, vol. 5, 478.

[15] *The Divine Names* 4.1, 2, PG 3.693B; ET = Colm Luibheid/Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius. The Complete Works*, NY/Mahwah 1987, 71,72.

[16] *The Divine Names* 4.4, PG 3.700A-B; ET = Luibheid/Rorem, 75.

[17] *The Ambigua*, PG 91.1392C-D.

CHAPTER TWO

[18] Heinrich Schlier, *Die Zeit der Kirche*. Exegetische Aufsatze und Vortrage 1, Freiburg etc. 1962, 285.

[19] Wolfgang Beinert, *Christus und der Kosmos*. Perspektiven zu einer Theologie der Schöpfung, Freiburg etc. 1974, 48.

[20] Maximus the Confessor, *Gnostic Chapters* 1.67, PG 90.1108B.

[21] Ibid.

[22] Cf. *The Ambigua*, PG 91.1365A-C.

[23] *Centuries on Love* 3.43, PG 90.1029B.

[24] *Baptism* 4th Response, PG 65.996A.

[25] Beinert, *Christus und der Kosmos*, 83.

[26] *Dogmatic Treatise to the Deacon Marinus* [= *Brief Theological and Polemical Works* 7], PG 91.80A.

[27] Heinrich - Jurgen Schulte - Vieting, "Technik und Verantwortung. 2um, Bemühen eines Technikers um ethische Selbsthilfe," *Herder Korrespondenz* 27 (1973) Nr. 4, 203, where he discusses the work of Hans Sachsse, *Technik und Verantwortung*, Freiburg 1972.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Schulte - Vieting, "Technik und Verantwortung", pp. 204-205.

[30] Karl Rahner, "Christology within an Evolutionary View of the World," in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 5, trans. K. H. Kruger, Baltimore/London 1966, 163-167.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Cf. Gabriel Marcel, *Journal métaphysique*, Paris 1935, pp. 124-126, 236-241, 252-253, 266-267, 271, 322-324. Besides Marcel, Robert Blanché has also made much of the character of the body as subject in *La notion du fait psychique. Essai sur les rapports du physique et du mental*, Paris, 1935.

[33] *The Making of Man* 10.2, 3t PG 44.152B, C; ET = H. A. Wilson, *NPNF* 2nd Series, vol. 5, 395-396.

[34] Cf. *The Ambigua*, PG 91.1341A-1345C.

CHAPTER THREE

[35] Nicetas Stethatos, *The Soul* 18.12-15, *Nicetas Stethatos. Opuscules et Lettres*, ed. J. Darrouzès, *SChr* 81. Paris 1961, 80,82.

[36] *The Ambigua*, PG 91.1321D-1324B.

[37] *The Ambigua*, PG 91.1100D-1101C.

[38] *Ethical Treatises* 1.3.1-8, *Syméon le Nouveau Théologien. Traités Théologiques et Ethiques*, ed. J. Darrouzès, vol. 1, *SChr* 122, Paris 1966, 194,196.

[39] Cf Myrrha Lot-Borodine, "L'anthropologie théocentrique de l'Orient Chrétien comme base de son expérience spirituelle," *Irénikon* 16 (1939) 6-21.

[40] *Ethical Treatises* 5.251-253, 255-257, *Syméon le Nouveau Théologien. Traités Théologiques et Ethiques*, ed. J. Darrouzès, vol. 2, *SChr* 129, Paris 1967, 98.

[41] Cf. *The Ambigua*, PG 91.1288D-1289D.

[42] *Triads in Defence of the Holy Hesychasts* 1.2.4, ed. P. K. Christou in *Grigoriou tou Palama. Syggrammata*, ed. P. K. Christou, Thessaloniki 1962, vol. 1, p. 397.15-19; ET = Nicholas Gendle, *Gregory Palamas. The Triads*, NY etc. 1983, 44.

[43] *Triads in Defence of the Holy Hesychasts* 1.2.1, ed. Christou, vol. 1, p. 393. 1-2, 6-8, 10.12; ET = Gendle, 41.

[44] *Triads in Defence of the Holy Hesychasts* 1.2.3, ed. Christou, vol. 1, p. 396. 17-22; ET = Gendle, 43.

[45] *Triads in Defence of the Holy Hesychasts* 1.2.19, ed. Christou, vol. 1, p. 526.24-527.3; ET = Gendle, 54.

[46] Cf. above at Chapter 2, 62.

[47] Gn 2:7 and cf. above at Chapter 1, p. 12 at n. 9.

[48] *Great Catechetical Oration* 5, PG 45.2 1 C-D.

[49] *Homilies* 45.4, PG 34.789B-C.

[50] *Dogmatic Poems* 8, *The Soul* 76-77, PG 37.452A.

[51] *The Procession of the Holy Spirit* 2.9, ed. B. Bobrinskoy in *Grigoriou tou Palama. Syggrammata*, ed. P. K. Christou, Thessaloniki 1962, vol. 1, p. 85. 14-19, and cf. Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, p. 69, where Lossky argues that the divine breath indicated a manner of creation, in virtue of which the human spirit is intimately connected with grace. This may be understood as an indissoluble connection between our soul and the power of God who gives it the possibility to subsist in his image, and in this sense the image continues to exist even in the fallen human being, through an uncreated energy, more as a relation and as an ontological dialogue than as a relation and as a dialogue of knowledge and of love of God. In this sense the expression of St. Gregory of Nazianzus that we are "particles of divinity" can be understood as a new interpretation given by Lossky to the breath of God: "This means that uncreated grace is implicated in the creative act itself, and that the soul receives at once life and grace: for grace is the breath of God, the 'current of divinity,' the vivifying presence of the Holy Spirit. If the human being starts to live when God breathes life into him, it is because the grace of the Holy Spirit is the real principle of our existence."

[52] *The Procession of the Holy Spirit* 2.8, ed. Bobribskoy, p. 85. 5-11.

[53] *Great Catechetical Oration* 5, PG 45.21D and *Dogmatic Poems* 8. *The Soul* 76-77, PG 37.452A.

[54] Cf. *The Ambigua*, PG 91.1077C.

[55] *Great Catechetical Oration* 5, PG 45.21D.

[56] Cf. The Contemplative Life 25, PG 147.86OA-B.

[57] B. Vyscheslavzev, "Das Ebenbild Gottes, in dem Sündenfall," in *Kirche, Staat und Mensch, Russisch-Orthodoxe Studien*, Geneva 1937, 295-315 at 310-311.

[58] B. Vyscheslavzev, "Das Ebenbild Gottes im. Wesen des

Manschen," in *Kirche, Staat und Mensch*, pp. 316-348 at 321-322.

[59] *Confessions* 1.1.1, PL 3 2.66 1.

[60] Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, Cambridge/London 1968, pp. 115-116 with reference to *Dramatizations*, PG 50.1361C (a work attributed to Palamas but by Michael Choniates).

[61] Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 116.

[62] *L'Orthodoxie*, Neuchatel/Paris, 1959, 82-83.

[63] Cf. The whole of *The Ambigua*, PG 91.1032A- 1417C.

[64] *The Ambigua*, PG 91.1220C.

[65] *Orations* 43.48 *In Praise of Basil the Great*, PG 36.560.

[66] Cf. Evdokimov, *L'Orthodoxie*, 80.

[67] *The Orthodox Faith* 2.12, PG 94.92013.

[68] *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* 39.17-19, 40.16-19, Gregory Palamas. *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters*, ed. R. E. Sinkewicz, Toronto 1988, pp. 126/128; ET = Sinkewicz, 127,129.

[69] *L'Orthodoxie*, 88.

[70] *L'Orthodoxie*, 84-85.

[71] *L'Orthodoxie*, 85, n. 176 citing St. John of Damascus, *Homily on the Withered Fig Tree* 1, PG 96.576B-577B.

[72] *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* 39, ed. Sinkewicz, p. 127.

[73] *L'Orthodoxie*, p. 80, with reference to Ps. Gregory of Nyssa, *Homily on the Creation of Man* 1, PG 44.257C.

[74] Vyscheslavzev, "Das Ebenbild Gottes im Wesen des Manschen," 334.

[75] *The Making ofMan* 16.17, PG 44.185C; ET = Wilson, 406.

[76] *Platonisme et théologie mystique*, Paris 1944, p. 58 and cf. Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on The Song of Songs* 15, PG 44.1117A-C and *Homilies on the Text: "Then the Son Himself"* (I Cor 15:28), PG 44.1316-132 1.

[77] *Antropologia Sv. Grigorii Palami*, Paris 1959, 355 (in Russian).

[78] *Orthodox Theology*, 67.

[79] *Orthodox Theology*, 125.

[80] *Orthodox Theology*, 126.

[81] Ibid.

[82] *Orthodox Theology*, 127-128.

[83] *Against the Heresies* 5.6, PG 7.1138A-B.

[84] Cf. *The Incarnation of the Word* 4.6.30-34 - 5.1.6-8, ed.

Kannengiesser, *SChr* 199, p. 278; ET = Robertson, 38.

[85] Cf. *The Ambigua*, PG 91.1285C-1288A.

[86] *The Orthodox Faith* 2.12, PG 94.924A-B; ET = F. H. Chase Jr., *St. John of Damascus. Writings*, FC 37, Washington 1981, 235-236.

[87] *God is Not the Author of Evil* 7, PG 31.345B.

[88] Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, 73.

[89] *Orthodox Theology*, 89.

[90] *Orthodox Theology*, 77-78.

[91] *The Incarnation of the Word* 5.1.1-5.2.9, ed. Kannengiesser, *SChr* 199, 278/280; ET = Robertson, 38.

[92] Ibid.

[93] *Ethical Treatises* 13.31-45, ed. Darrouzès, *SChr* 129, 402-404.

[94] *Ethical Treatises* 13.45-53, 55-57, ed. Darrouzès, *SChr* 129, 404.

[95] Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, 71.

CHAPTER FOUR

[96] *The Celestial Hierarchy* 4.2, PG 3.180A; ET = Luibheid/Rorem, 156-157.

[97] Sobornic, from the Slavic *sobornost*, is the preferred Orthodox term for what in Western Christian contexts would be called "catholic" or "universal." The root image of the synodal gathering (sobor) remains an important element in Orthodox usage of this word. [Trans. note.]

[98] Basil the Great, *Homilies on the Hexaemeron* 1.5, PG 29.13A-B.

[99] *The Divine Names* 10.3, PG 3.937C-940A; ET = Luibheid/Rorem, 120-121.

[100] *The Celestial Hierarchy* 14, PG 3.32 1; ET = Luibheid/Rorem, 181-182.

[101] *Homilies on Hebrews* 6.4, PG 63.59-60.

[102] *Tapestries* 7.11, PG 9.488B.

[103] *The Celestial Hierarchy* 6.7, 24, PG 3.904.

[104] *The Incomprehensible Nature of God* 4.11-12, PG 48.72 1, ET = Paul W. Harkins, St. John Chrysostom. *On the Incomprehensible Nature of God*, FC 72, Washington 1984, 119.

[105] Cf. Maximus the Confessor, *To Thalassius: On Various Questions* 22, PG 90.317B: "He who gave being to the entire visible and invisible creation only by the movement of His will had established before all ages, therefore before the creation of the world, a good and unutterable plan for it. And this was in order to unite himself – without change – with the nature of men through genuine, hypostatic union, that is, to unite human nature to himself without alteration."

[106] *Homilies* 3, PG 151.33C.

[107] *Homilies* 36, PG 151.449D.

[108] *Triads in Defence of the Holy Hesychasts* 2.3.57-61, ed. Christou, vol. 1, pp. 590.23-594.24, citing Ps. Dionysius, *The Celestial Hierarchy* 8, PG 3.237D; ET = Luibheid/Rorem, 167.

[109] The Celestial Hierarchy 4.2, PG 3.18OA; ET = Luibheid/ Rorem, 156-157.

[110] Gregory Palamas, *Homilies* 6, PG 151.818B-C; Gregory of Nyssa, *The Making of Man* 2, PG 44.132D- 13 3B.

[111] *Questions on Genesis* 1.20, PG 80.105 A.

[112] Gregory Palamas, *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* 44.1-4, 46.8-9, ed. Sinkewicz, pp. 132, 134; ET = Sinkewicz, 133-135.

[113] *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* 62.1 -12, ed. Sinkewicz, pp. 154/156; ET = Sinkewicz, 155-157.

[114] *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* 62.12 -19, ed. Sinkewicz, p. 156; ET = Sinkewicz, 157.

[115] *Longer Rules* 2, PG 31.909B, 912A and cf. 909D.

[116] *The Nature of Man* 1, PG 40.524B; ET = W. Telfer, *Cyril of Jerusalem and Nemesius of Emesa*, LCC 4, Philadelphia 1965, 246.

[117] *The Nature of Man* 1, PG 40.532B-533B.

[118] Maximus the Confessor, *To Thalassius: On Various Questions* 49, PG 90.461A (Scholion 10): "The mind that lingers in imagination upon the representation of sensible things for the sake of the senses becomes a creator of impure passions; through contemplation it does not cross over to the intelligible realities that are kin to it."

[119] Basil the Great, *The Holy Spirit* 38, PG 32.136D-137B; Michael Psellus, *The Activity of Demons* 7, PG 122.836A-837B.

[120] *The Celestial Hierarchy* 4.2, PG 3.18OA-B; ET = Luibheid/ Rorem, 156-157.

[121] *The Celestial Hierarchy* 4.2, PG 3.18OC; ET = Luibheid/ Rorem, 157.

[122] *Triads in Defence of the Holy Hesychasts* 2.3.29-30, ed. Christou, 563.17-25; 563.26-564.8, 10-18; 565.2-6.

[123] *The Divine Names* 1.4, PG 3.592B-593A; ET = Luibheid/ Rorem, 52-53.

[124] *On Prayer* 81, PG 79.1185A, ET = G. E. H. Palmer, Philip Sherard and Kallistos Ware, *The Philokalia*, vol. 1, London 1979, 65.

[125] *On Prayer* 80, PG 79.1184D; ET = Palmer/Sherard/Ware, 65.

[126] *Commentary on the Song of Songs. Homily* 8, PG 44. 948C-949A; ET = Casimir McCambley, *Saint Gregory of Nyssa. Commentary on the Song of Songs*, Brookline 1987, 165-166.

[127] *The Ascension of Christ*, PG 46.692D-693D.

[128] Cf. *The Incomprehensible Nature of God* 3.1, 3, 5-6, PG 48.720, 721-722, 723-726.

[129] Cf. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on the Gospel of St. John* 1.49, PG 73.224A-B.

[130] *Orations* 28.31, PG 36.72B-C; ET = C. G. Browne/J. E. Swallow, *NPNF* 2nd Series, vol. 7, 300 [altered].

[131] Cf, *The Celestial Hierarchy. Paraphrase of Pachymeres* 7.4, PG 3.233A-B.

[132] Cf. *The Celestial Hierarchy. Paraphrase of Pachymeres* 7.3, PG 3.229C-D.

[133] Cf. Gregory Palamas: "Therefore seeing, even through visions, I know the light of what is above vision." [Source unidentified, Trans. note.]

[134] Cf. *The Celestial Hierarchy. Paraphrase of Pachymeres* 7.3, PG 3.229A-B.

[135] Panagiotis N. Trembelas, *Dogmatique de 'Eglise orthodoxe catholique*, 3 vols., Bruges 1966-1968, at vol. 1 (1966), pp. 489-491.

[136] Hermas, *The Shepherd. Vision* 3.4.1-2, ed. R. Joly, *SChr* 53, Paris 1968, pp. 108/110; Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechetical Lectures* 6.6 and 11. 11, PG 3 3.545 B -548B and cf. 70 1 C-705 A.

[137] *Commentary on Isaiah* (Isa 6:6) 6.183, PG 30.428C; *Against Eunomius* 3.1-2, PG 29.656A-657B and cf. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Ephesians* 7. 1, PG 62.49. A

[138] *The Orthodox Faith* 2.3, PG 94.865A-873C.

[139] *The Celestial Hierarchy. Paraphrase of Pachymeres* 13.2, PG 3.309A-B.

[140] Cf. *Triads in Defence of the Holy Hesychasts* 2.3.31, ed. Christou, vol. 1, 565.23-566.23.

[141] *The Celestial Hierarchy. Paraphrase of Pachymeres* 7.4, PG 3.232B-C.

[142] Cf. *The Divine Names* 9.9 and 4.8, 9, PG 3.916C-D and 70413-705B. Compare also the sculpture of the famous Romanian artist Constantin Brincusi at Tirgu-Jiu in Oltenia, Romania.

[143] *Homilies on Ephesians* 1.4, PG 62.15- 16.

CHAPTER FIVE

[144] Basil the Great, *God is Not the Author of Evil* 8, PG 31.345D-348D.

[145] *God is Not the Author of Evil* 5, PG 31.341.B-C.

[146] Trembelas, *Dogmatique*, vol. 1 (1966), 501-502.

[147] *To Thalassius: On Various Questions*, Introduction, PG 90.253B,C.

[148] Maximus the Confessor, *To Thalassius: On Various Questions*, Introduction, PG 90.256B.

[149] Cf. Michael Psellos, *The Activity of the Demons* 5, PG 122.832A-833A.

[150] *God is Not the Author of Evil* 8, PG 31.348A-B.

[151] Michael Psellos, *The Activity of the Demons* 4, PG 122.829B.

[152] *God is Not the Author of Evil* 8, PG 31.349C-D.

[153] *The Activity of the Demons* 12, PG 122.848A-B, B-C.

[154] *Letter to Castor on the Eight Thoughts of Evil*, PG 28.872C-905B.

[155] *To Thalassius: On Various Questions* 50, PG 90.472B-D.

CHAPTER SIX

[156] *To Thalassius: On Various Questions*, Introduction, PG 90.257C-260A.

[157] *Vision of Paradise* 15-17, ed. Darrouzès, *SChr* 81, pp. 170/172.

[158] *The One Hundred and Fifty Chapters* 50.1-7, ed. Sinkewicz, 142; ET = Sinkewicz, 143.

[159] *God is Not the Author of Evil* 7, PG 31.344C-345A.

[160] *The Making of Man* 19.3, PG 44.197A; ET = Wilson, 409.

[161] St. Basil the Great considered, however, that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil as a particular tree, but it was not evil in itself, even though it was tempting because of its beauty and the sweetness of its fruits, hence, as representing the beauty and sensible sweetness of creation. Cf. *God is Not the Author of Evil* 8, PG 31.348C-D.

[162] Cf. *The Making of Man* 18.1-9, PG 44.192A- 196B.

[163] *The Making of Man* 20.2, PG 44.20OA; ET = Wilson, 410.

[164] *The Making of Man* 20.2-4, PG 44.20OA-D; ET = Wilson, 410.

[165] *God is Not the Author of Evil* 8, PG31.348D.

[166] Cf *The Making of Man* 19-20, PG 44.196C-20 IA.

[167] Panaghiotis Nellas, *Justification in Christ According to Nicholas Cabasilas* (in Greek), Athens 1974 (typescript), 75-76. 169.

[168] Nellas, *Justification*, 77.

[169] *Justification*, 77, citing Nicholas Cabasilas, "The Life in Christ" 2, PG 150.536B-537A.

[170] *The Titles of the Psalms* 2.13, PG 44.565B.

CHAPTER SEVEN

[171] Dumitru Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1994).

[172] Gotthold Hasenhüttl, "Die Gottesfrage heute," in *Gott, Mensch, Universum*. Der Christ vor den Fragen der Zeit, ed. I Hüttenbügel, Graz etc. 1974, 545-573, 563-564.

[173] *TheLife of Moses* 2.243-244, PG 44.405C-D; ET = Abraham J. Malherbe/Everett Ferguson, *Gregory of Nyssa. The Life of Moses*, NY etc. 1978, 117-118.

[174] *The Life ofMoses* 2.235 [233], 239, PG 44.40IB[A], D; ET = Malherbe/Ferguson, 115-116.

[175] Cf. *Homilies on the Song of Songs* 6, PG. 44.888A; ET = McCambley, 128, and *The Life of Moses* 2.238-239, PG 44.404C-405A; ET = Malherbe/Ferguson, 116.

[176] *The Ambigua*, PG 91.1076C-D.
[177] Hasenhüttl, "Die Gottesfrage heute," 566-567, 567-568, 570.
[178] Hasenhüttl, "Die Gottesfrage heute," 573.